DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 410 CE 072 264

AUTHOR	Rawlinson, S.; Connor, H.
TITLE	Developing Responsiveness: College-Employer Interaction. Report 300.
INSTITUTION	Sussex Univ., Brighton (England). Inst. for Employment Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	Council for Industry and Higher Education (United Kingdom).; Department for Education and Employment, London (England).; Further Education Funding Council, London (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-85184-226-8
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	83p.
AVAILABLE FROM	BEBC Distribution, 15 Albion Close, Parkstone, Poole BH12 3LL, England, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Attitudes; *Attitude Change; Case Studies; *Change Strategies; Cooperative Planning; *Educational Cooperation; Employer Attitudes; Foreign Countries; Interaction Process Analysis; National Surveys; *Partnerships in Education; *School Business Relationship; *Success; Teacher Attitudes; Technical Institutes; Two Year Colleges; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Interaction between United Kingdom colleges of further education and employers was examined, and factors promoting and inhibiting successful interaction were identified. The study was based primarily on interviews conducted with 102 college staff, 20 student discussion groups, 75 employers, representatives of 5 training and enterprise councils (TECs), and 10 other individuals involved in coordinating training in a total of 6 geographic regions. Information was also gathered from national workshops and an expert colloquium attended by representatives of key organizations. All the colleges studied were active in developing links with employers and were generally perceived to be improving levels of employer responsiveness. Four main types of employer-college interaction were identified: employer-led education and training; voluntary, work-related activities with students; advisory or planning-based activities to aid individual colleges and employers; and local or regional planning with other organizations. It was recommended that colleges develop indicators of success and minimum quality standards for all types of college-employer interaction and set clear planning priorities for different types of employer-led work based on identified benefits and strengths of the college. (Appended are the following: classification of college-employer interaction with examples; research methodology; successful outcomes and criteria for measuring success; and factors promoting/inhibiting success.) (MN)

ED 398 410

Developing Responsiveness: College – Employer Interaction

IES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Sue Rawlinson, Helen Connor

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
A Davidson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CE 072 264

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DEVELOPING RESPONSIVENESS: COLLEGE–EMPLOYER INTERACTION

Other titles from IES:

Employers' Use of the NVQ System
M Spilsbury, J Moralee, C Evans
Report 293, 1995. 1-85184-220-9

Employers' Views of Education Business Links
J Hillage, K Hyndley, G Pike
Report 283, 1995. 1-85184-209-8

Evaluation of Investors in People in England and Wales, 1994-1995
M Spilsbury, J Moralee, J Hillage, D Frost
Report 289, 1995. 1-85184-215-2

A catalogue of these and over 100 other titles is available from IES.

DEVELOPING RESPONSIVENESS: COLLEGE–EMPLOYER INTERACTION

S Rawlinson, H Connor

THE INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES Report 300

Published by:

THE INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES
Mantell Building
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RF
UK

Tel. + 44 (0) 1273 686751
Fax + 44 (0) 1273 690430

Copyright © 1996 The Further Education Funding Council

No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form by any means — graphic, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage or retrieval systems — without prior permission in writing from the Institute for Employment Studies.

The views expressed in the report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Employment.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-85184-226-8

Printed in Great Britain by Microgen UK Ltd

The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, international centre of research and consultancy in human resource issues. It has close working contacts with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, professional and employee bodies, and foundations. Since it was established 25 years ago the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has a multidisciplinary staff of over 50. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, training and publications.

IES aims to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management. IES achieves this by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

Formerly titled the Institute of Manpower Studies (IMS), the Institute changed its name to the *Institute for Employment Studies* (IES) in Autumn 1994, this name better reflecting the full range of the Institute's activities and involvement.

Acknowledgements

IES wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by staff in colleges, employing organisations, TECs and other organisations visited in the case studies. Many gave up valuable time to see us and we are grateful for their contribution. Thanks must also go to the project team, Jim Hillage, Ivana La Valle, Nii Djan Tackey Ken Walsh and Emma Hart for preparation of the final report.

Contents

1. Introduction 1
- 1.1 Background 2
- 1.2 The classification of college–employer interaction 3
- 1.3 Methodology 5

2. The Changing Context of College–employer Interaction 8
- 2.1 Incorporation of colleges 8
- 2.2 Changing patterns of participation 9
- 2.3 Changes in employment and training 11
- 2.4 The new qualifications framework 12
- 2.5 National initiatives and the role of TECs 13
- 2.6 Conclusion 15

3. Interaction Involving Employers and Learners 16
- 3.1 Employer led education and training 17
- 3.2 Voluntary work related activities with students 27
- 3.3 Advisory and planning based interaction for individual colleges and employers 34
- 3.4 Advisory and planning based interaction at local/regional level 39
- 3.5 Overview of college–employer interaction 44
- 3.6 The role of TECs 46

4. Conclusions and Recommended Areas for Action 48
- 4.1 Introduction 48
- 4.2 Understanding the volume and nature of interaction 48
- 4.3 Managing changes in employer led education and training 50
- 4.4 Valuing work related activities with students 54
- 4.5 Colleges' responsiveness within the wider community 56
- 4.6 TECs and college responsiveness 58
- 4.7 Indirect responsiveness 59
- 4.8 In conclusion 60

Annex 1: The Classification of College–employer Interaction with Examples 62

Annex 2: Research Methodology 64

Annex 3: Successful Outcomes and Criteria for Measuring Success 68

Annex 4: Factors Promoting and Inhibiting Success 70

1. Introduction

That further education is considered to be important in terms of this country's economic and social development is clear from the 1994 White Paper *Competitiveness — Helping Businesses to Win*, which expects FE colleges to:

> *'play a key part in meeting the needs of employers, young people and adults for high quality general and vocational education and training'.*

To play a key part colleges must understand the needs of employers, learners and the wider community, be responsive to those needs, and to changing circumstances. A central element of this responsiveness is the interaction between colleges and employers. Interaction takes many forms, the most visible being companies using colleges for the training and recruitment of employees. This is a way in which colleges can be directly responsive to employers' needs, but colleges also interact with employers who provide work experience for students, and advise on courses and qualifications. This sort of interaction constitutes a more indirect form of responsiveness which can enhance the quality of vocational education and training, and extend and improve the skills base of the future workforce.

It is important to understand the scale and nature of this interaction, but a more important demonstration of responsiveness is whether or not the interaction is effective in enriching students' learning, and providing employers with the skilled workforce they need.

This report presents the findings of a research study commissioned jointly by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to investigate the level and nature of interaction between colleges and employers, and the factors promoting or inhibiting success. It forms the second stage of a phased project. In the first stage (also undertaken by IES) a research review was undertaken which summarised current findings in regard to good practice in the development and management of college–employer interaction. It provided the basis for the construction of a typology of the different kinds of interaction.

This second stage sought to build on this earlier work by:

- further developing the typology, with particular reference to how interaction is developing in response to changes in the status of colleges and the nature of learning
- developing criteria for evaluating relationships in terms of their success in contributing to beneficial outcomes for students, employers and colleges
- identifying college and employer policies and initiatives which foster effective relationships
- identifying social, economic, cultural and other factors which may inhibit responsiveness
- suggesting how incentives to interaction may be increased and barriers minimised.

Findings from the study will help policy makers make decisions about ways of influencing colleges and employers to work more closely together, and individual managers and staff in colleges and industry/commerce to develop more effective interaction.

In this chapter we provide an introduction, covering:

- the background
- the typology or classification of college–employer interaction
- methodology
- the structure of the report.

1.1 Background

It is now ten years since the Responsive College Project (RCP) began to take shape, with a remit to promote enhanced responsiveness of colleges of further education to the training needs of industry and commerce. The work was undertaken at the time of an influential White Paper *Training for Jobs* (1984), a time of debate about further education (FE) meeting the needs of its customers more effectively.

Since RCP, colleges have undergone major changes, and are now free-standing corporations able to generate their own income. The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) are in place with a responsibility to improve and develop the skills of the workforce. The White Paper quoted above, and the more recent *Competitiveness — Forging Ahead* (1995), have enhanced the TECs' role in relation to colleges and the local community. Economic and demographic changes, shifts in patterns of employer training, and a complete restructuring of national vocational qualifications have all occurred in the last ten years and have had a significant effect on the FE sector and the training market.

The earlier research review (Stage 1) found that a considerable amount of interaction between employers and colleges takes

place but in many different forms, producing a complex and often confusing picture. Changes are occurring in the type of interaction as a consequence of some of the contextual changes outlined above, including:

- a decline in part-time day and block release training for employers (due primarily to the demise of the traditional apprenticeship system)
- its replacement (partially) by training more related to individual employers' specific needs and the delivery and assessment of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)
- the introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), where work experience is not mandatory (as it was for BTEC) but is often an integral part of new GNVQ programmes
- increased college planning activity, involving TECs, employers and community groups
- new regional/local planning fora which are expected to involve colleges.

The research review found that much of the literature concentrated on national initiatives such as EBPs, TVEI and PICKUP, or work by large employers (*eg* BP, British Telecommunications, Sainsburys) and there was comparatively little on the kind of interaction with employers which continues on a day-to-day basis in colleges, formally and informally. While it gave ideas about the types of activities with rationales for employers getting involved with colleges and some guidance on how to set them up, much of the good practice identified was generic and could be applied to most types of education–business interaction, rather than specific types of college–employer interaction and their effectiveness. Furthermore, most of the literature was written before incorporation of colleges and recent initiatives such as Competitiveness Fund, Training Credits and Investors in People.

This second stage of the project was necessary therefore to gain a deeper understanding of interaction and responsiveness, and in particular to test out the typology developed in Stage 1.

1.2 Classification of college–employer interaction

The typology or classification was developed from compiling and comparing lists of activity from a wide range of publications specifically concerned with college–employer links, and combining these with other current known activity in colleges which included employer-led training, and strategic planning.

It is based on the hypothesis that there are four main types of activities which colleges and employers jointly carry out, and that the different types have separate functions for colleges, for

employers and for students. The types of interaction each involve different kinds of relationships and staff, in both the colleges and companies. The basis of the classification is functional and the interaction can be broadly divided into two types, each sub-divided into two categories:

1. Learner-centred

- employer-led training and education
- voluntary, work-related activities with full-time or non-employed students.

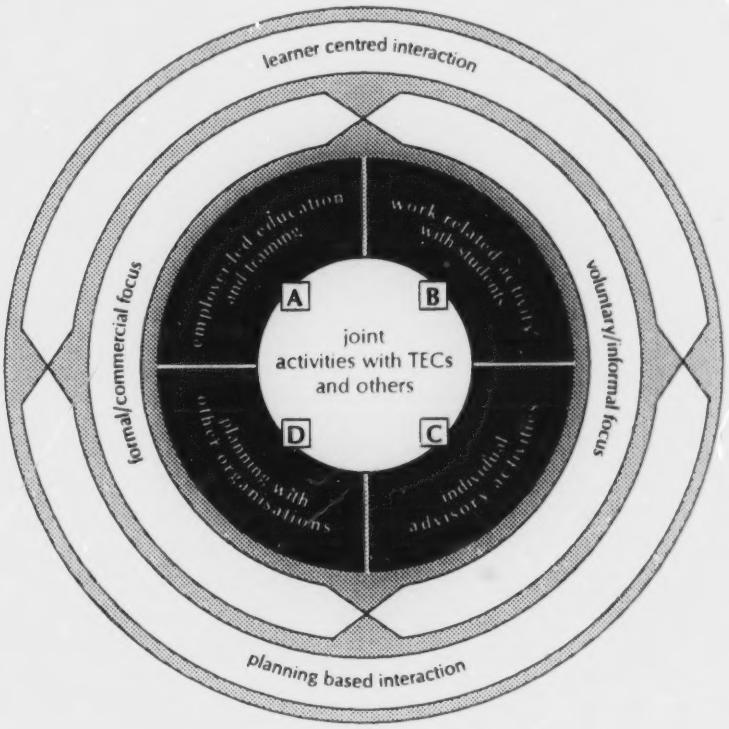
2. Planning-based

- advice and information between individual employers and colleges to aid internal college planning
- activities which aid the planning of education and training in the wider community.

This classification also has two other dimensions:

- activity which has a **commercial or formal** basis. The training of employees, or planning in order to meet the National Targets for Education and Training are in this category.

A classification of college–employer interaction



Source: IES

- activity of a **voluntary and informal** kind. Work experience provision or personal contact between lecturers and employers fall into this category.

These types of interaction are supplemented and overlaid with activities which might include, or be facilitated by TECs and others (*eg* Education Business Partnerships (EBPs), Strategic Fora, Compact schemes, Neighbourhood Engineers) some of which can be located in any area of the model.

1.3 Methodology

The typology formed the basis of our approach to the study as its focus was to investigate the different types of activity. We used the classification to map current types of activity in selected colleges, employers and TECs and to test the classification against them to see whether or not it held up or needed amending in the light of the reality on the ground. The model did prove to be very useful in describing activities which are very different from each other and are often separated within colleges. There is in practice some overlap, and as will be seen in the findings, potential for greater overlap than at present in terms of the benefits to be gained. We also attempted to look more holistically at the range of interaction activities to assess the responsiveness of the whole college or employer. As will be seen in the report, this proved to be more difficult with regard to colleges because of a lack of central management, and quantification, of the wide range of interaction with employers that takes place in most colleges.

The study began in December 1994, and was based mainly on interviews in colleges, employing organisations, TECs and other relevant bodies in six geographical locations. It comprised several phases:

- selection of the six case study areas, each of which comprised a cluster of three or four colleges
- interviews in each case study area. In total these comprised:
  - 102 college staff (ranging from principal to lecturer and including business development managers and marketing staff)
  - 20 student discussion groups, of five to ten each, covering a range of full-time and part-time students, courses and subjects
  - 75 employers which had some kind of contact with the colleges. These ranged in size from three to over 5,000 employees, with almost a quarter employing under 50 employees. They covered industry, services and the public sector.
  - five TECs (mainly education managers/officers) and ten others (*eg* EBP managers, Compact co-ordinators).

- four national workshops, with invited representatives from colleges, employers, TECs and other bodies, and attended by almost 100 people in total
- an expert colloquium, attended by representatives of key organisations (*eg* CBI, TEC National Council) and the project sponsors, where papers were presented on different perspectives of college–employer interaction.

There are several points about the methodology which should be noted when considering both findings and the conclusions of this work:

- The study was designed to be qualitative in nature rather than providing substantive quantitative information. While data was sought to support views and statements it was generally not available.
- The small size of the sample of interviewees means that the findings are not representative in any strict statistical sense. There were some consistent messages and issues being highlighted, however, which means that they do provide generalisable findings which can be applied more widely.
- The interviews concentrated on the main activities being undertaken by colleges and employers and with a sample of staff. Inevitably, not all activities have been reported and discussed with us.
- Employers were selected because they had some contact with the college, from lists provided by colleges and TECs, and were therefore likely to be both more active and supportive of interaction than the majority of employers in the locality.

The study nevertheless provided a very valuable in-depth investigation of this area of work. All participants were willing and enthusiastic, and the insights gained from their detailed responses provides for the first time a most comprehensive picture of the whole area of college–employer interaction in one single study.

1.3.1 Structure of the report

The report is divided into three main chapters:

- The changing context of college–employer interaction (Chapter 2).
- Interaction in practice — a detailed report on the four types of interaction studied, including benefits, critical factors for successful outcomes, and measures of effectiveness (Chapter 3).
- Conclusions which summarise the main findings and provide recommendations for improving college–employer responsiveness (Chapter 4).

- The Annexes provide further details of the methodology and classification.
- A separate Appendix is available which contains the detailed case studies and evidence on which this report is based.

2. The Changing Context of College–Employer Interaction

As highlighted in Chapter 1, colleges are undergoing major changes in their role, funding, provision and management, which in turn are being influenced by many external changes relating to the labour market. These were confirmed in the case study interviews as having a significant influence on the type and volume of college–employer interaction. The key changes are outlined below, under five main headings:

- incorporation of colleges
- changes in patterns of participation
- changes in employment and training
- the new qualifications framework
- national initiatives and TECs.

They provide the context for the research project and, in particular, some of the findings that are presented in the next chapter. It should be noted that some of the newer developments mentioned in this chapter had only just begun or were not operative when the fieldwork was completed.

2.1 Incorporation of colleges

2.1.1 Independence

Further education, tertiary and sixth form colleges in England and Wales assumed ownership of their assets and liabilities on 1st April 1993 and became corporations independent of local education authority (LEA) control. Under statutory regulations, their governing bodies should consist of between ten to 20 members, at least half of which must be business members, including a member of the local TEC.

All the colleges in the cases studies met the minimum requirements for employer representativeness.

2.1.2 FEFC provision

Colleges now receive most of their funding from the FEFC. These funds replace the LEA funds and put simply, are based on

the number of students enrolled, the type and content of the course or programme, student retention, and achievement of qualifications. The colleges have to provide strategic plans, set targets for student growth, and a programme of full inspection has been set in place to evaluate the colleges' performance, including its responsiveness to employers and the wider community.[1]

All colleges in the case study interviews had strategic plans which included some mention of employer responsiveness, but not all had been inspected yet.

2.1.3 Additional income

Colleges are now free to earn or receive income from other sources; the balance between these sources is left to the choice of individual colleges. They base their decisions on a number of factors which include the local social and economic context, competition from other colleges or providers of education and training, and the expertise and resources of the college. The main sources of additional funding are grants from TECs for training provision (*eg* Training for Work, Youth Training) and development projects and initiatives, fees from individuals, other institutions and employers, the European Social Fund, and the letting of premises.

Most of the employers and college staff we interviewed felt that incorporation had given colleges a commercial edge.

2.2 Changing patterns of participation

These changes in the way colleges are funded and governed have been accompanied by significant changes in the patterns of participation in FE. In the last few years there has been a decrease in certain types of learners but increases in others, a shift in the balance from employer-led to full time enrolments, changes in the ages of employer-led participants, and changes in the numbers studying certain subjects. The key trends are as follows.

2.2.1 Employer-led enrolments[2]

The overall number of colleges' employer-led enrolments (*ie* students sponsored by employers) dropped by nine per cent between 1988 and 1992. Provisional figures for 1993 show a

---

[1] A survey of responsiveness has recently been carried out by the FE Inspectorate.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all data in Sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 are from FEFC unpublished data 1995.

further reduction of 11 per cent from 1992 to 1993, an overall reduction of 19 per cent over five years.

In 1988, 59 per cent of employer-led enrolments were 16 to 18 year olds. By 1992 this number had dropped to 38 per cent and the provisional figures show a drop by 1993 to 34 per cent. The proportion of 16 to 18 year olds not in full-time education who can be classified as employer-led enrolments has remained fairly constant at around 16 per cent, so the decline mainly represents a reduction due to the demographic downturn in the cohort. There was a corresponding rise within employer-led enrolments; the proportion of those aged over 19 has risen from around 40 per cent in 1988 to almost two thirds in 1992.

All general FE colleges (GFCs) in the case studies had experienced reductions in employer-led enrolments overall, some more so than others, and a shift in the student age-profile.

2.2.2 Full time and independent enrolments

The number of 16 to 18 year olds in the population declined from 2.1 million in 1988-9 to 1.7 million in 1992-3, a reduction of 18 per cent. However, during the same period, participation in all full-time education increased from 35 per cent of the cohort to 52 per cent. The number of 16 and 17 year olds participating in full-time and sandwich courses actually rose in further education from 305,000 in 1988 to over 370,000 in 1993, an increase of 11 per cent[1].

Part-time enrolments overall have remained relatively stable since 1988 and so the decline has been in employer-led enrolments. Part-time students are now more likely to be independent and coming to college without employers' sponsorship. Independent student enrolments outweighed employer-led enrolments by a very high margin in most colleges in our study.

2.2.3 Sectoral enrolments

The biggest declines in enrolment in England by sector from 1988 to 1993 were in construction (down by 49 per cent), engineering (down by 27 per cent) and agriculture (down by 20 per cent). However, engineering was still the largest single sector of employer led enrolments in 1993 with 29 per cent of the total, followed by business studies at 24 per cent. Science subjects have seen the most dramatic increase, up by 43 per cent to 1992 although they still only made up five per cent (18,000 in total) of employer led enrolments.

---

[1] *Statistics of Education*, Department for Education, 1993/4.

In most colleges in our study the focus of employer-led activity (and in particular customised training) had traditionally been in engineering, science and technology programmes, though business and commercial training was beginning to feature more strongly.

2.3 Changes in employment and training

2.3.1 Sectoral changes

One of the most widely acknowledged changes in the economy has been the fall in the proportion of the UK workforce employed in manufacturing, and the shift to business and finance. Between 1971 and 1993, the proportion of the workforce employed in manufacturing dropped from 36 per cent to 20 per cent. At the same time, the number of people employed in banking, finance and business services has more than doubled from 1.3 million to 2.8 million.[1] However, employer-led enrolments in business occupations have been declining each year since 1990, from 93,000 to 1993's provisional figure of 74,000, and only accounted for an estimated 25 per cent of enrolments in 1993, less than for manufacturing (28 per cent)[2].

Evidence from the case studies suggests that this trend is due both to commercial employers making less use of external training providers than those in manufacturing, and comparatively less use of colleges in particular. However, in all cases the traditional base of employer-led training in manufacturing is becoming broader.

2.3.2 Patterns of training

Employers continue to invest in training, but are increasingly likely to be training their existing workforce to increase multi-skilling and flexibility, and recruiting fewer 16 year olds for initial training. Employers' commitment to training during the recent recession is shown in the continuing high proportions providing off-the-job training (78 per cent of companies with over 25 employees in the last twelve months[3]). An increasing percentage of employees receive training (42 per cent in 1994), and the average number of training days rose to 6.4 in 1994, up from 4.5 in 1993.[4]

In the past year most employers (64 per cent) reported funding or arranging health and safety/first aid training, 47 per cent training in new technology, 47 per cent management training

---

1 *Competitiveness. Forging Ahead*, HMSO 1995

2 FESR

3 *Competitiveness* 1995

4 *Skills in Britain Survey*, ED 1994

and 41 per cent supervisory training. Training was most common for employees in public administration, education and health (23 per cent), financial services (18 per cent) and energy and water sectors (18 per cent)[1].

As shown later in Chapter 3, health and safety training comprised a significant and growing area of employer-led training in many colleges, as did training for public sector employers.

2.4 The new qualifications framework

In July 1993 the Secretary of State for Education announced that after compulsory schooling there would be 'three qualification pathways'. These would adopt different approaches and encourage different styles of learning but could all provide a foundation for further study or employment. The three pathways are now in operation in FE and are:

- National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), which are very job-specific qualifications grouped into 11 occupational areas at five levels of achievement and are intended to be taken by those already in work.
- General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), piloted from 1992, but expanding rapidly with an estimated 150,000 students in 1994. They provide education and training in broad occupational areas at three levels.[2]
- 'A'/'AS' levels and GCSEs, which can usually be studied full or part time in colleges.

This combination of qualifications, along with the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) Trainer and Assessor Awards and various higher level courses (*eg* Access to HE, professional qualifications) has been embraced by colleges, and an increasing variety of qualifications is now available. The different qualifications allow for various types and levels of employer involvement.

Our case studies highlighted the growing importance (in volume terms) of GNVQ programmes where work experience of some kind was universally provided and of TDLB assessment training for employees. Colleges were also delivering and assessing NVQs for employer-led training. They trained their own and employers' staff for TDLB trainer and assessor awards.

---

1 *Skill Needs in Britain*, IFF, 1994

2 *Labour Market and Skill Trends* 1995/6

2.5 National initiatives and the role of TECs

The last few years have seen the introduction of national strategies and initiatives which aim to improve the skill levels of the current and future workforce. Many of these are now co-ordinated by TECs, and delivered through training providers and employers in their area. This section looks at the initiatives which have had, or are likely to have, an impact on college–employer interaction. The role of TECs was highlighted in the recent White Paper:

> *'TECs have a key contribution to make to enhancing the performance of the local economy — both through their own activities to improve business competitiveness and develop workforce skills, and by taking a lead in co-ordinating local action. Over a thousand local business and community leaders are members of TEC boards. In some areas, TECs and local Chambers of Commerce have merged and others are seeking to merge, with the aim of improving the quality of their services.'* (*Competitiveness. Forging Ahead*, 1995)

2.5.1 Planning

TECs have been given a specific role with respect to the planning of local education and training provision. They are required to approve colleges' strategic plans, and to provide colleges with labour market information (LMI). Newly constituted regional and sub-regional groupings, which can cover several TEC areas, have been set up and include representatives from all TECs, FEFC regions and the Department for Education and Employment. One of their responsibilities is to consider the adequacy of, and gaps in, FE provision by reference to college plans and LMI, and advise FEFC on priorities for action. They also agree priorities and criteria for Competitiveness Funds and recommend bids for funding.

2.5.2 Funding specifically for colleges

The Work Related Further Education (WRFE) in 1993/4 amounted to £105 million. Seventy-five per cent of this went to colleges and the remainder comprises two new funds, the Development and Competitiveness Funds. The Competitiveness Fund is approximately £20 million, operated by TECs, and is intended to create, develop and/or maintain FE provision in response to critical labour market needs. The emphasis is on providing state of the art capital equipment. The Development Fund, approximately £10 million, is managed by TECs, and available to support local priorities for college provision and student support systems.

The majority of our case study colleges had received development funds from TECs, though often relatively small scale, and several were involved in consortia bids for Competitiveness funds.

New initiatives from the Department for Education and Employment are expected to support and complement the existing work of colleges and TECs in three areas: collecting and using labour market information; encouraging more employers to develop links with FE colleges; and increasing the work-relatedness of GNVQs.

2.5.3 Training initiatives

A variety of national initiatives is under way. The main ones affecting colleges are:

- Modern and Accelerated Modern Apprenticeships. These are being developed in over 50 industry sectors, covering 150 occupations with NVQ level 3 qualifications. About 1,400 young people are already on the prototype programmes and there is now access to them in all TEC areas. In Autumn 1995, the full programme was launched throughout England.
- GNVQ Scholarship Schemes offer an education programme supported by employers. Local schemes are being developed to supplement the national ones. TECs and EBPs may act as brokers between employers and education providers.
- Youth Training and Training for Work programmes continue, with some colleges contracted to TECs as Training Providers. From 1995 all school leavers who want to take part in YT or Modern Apprenticeship will get Youth Credits (originally called Training Credits) entitling them to training with the employer or training provider of their choice. The funding of YT and TfW programmes has shifted to output related funding which is likely to have an influence on provision of certain types of courses.
- Investors in People now has over 15,200 organisations committed to the Investors standard, covering 19 per cent of the employed workforce. This has encouraged organisations to think more about the individual needs of their staff and stimulated training and development (often provided by colleges).
- There are additional initiatives worth about £63 million until 1997/8 to support updating and training for SMEs, and these will be managed by TECs.
- 100 Business Links have been set up across the country, with pump-priming funding for a three year period. They provide a wide range of business support services but may have an increasing brokerage role between employers and colleges, particularly small and medium enterprises or businesses (SMEs).
- Many programmes are already in place specifically to support education business links of a voluntary nature, often with schools but in some cases with colleges. The most commonly found in colleges are Young Enterprise, Compacts,

Understanding Industry, and Business in the Community. Local Education Business Partnerships (EBP) are assisting the links between education and business by organising work experience for schools, getting educational institutions and employers together, or providing funds for particular projects and initiatives. EBPs work with all types of educational institutions, though the main focus for most is schools.

- The role and management of the Careers Service has been changing dramatically, as it moved out of local authority control. In many places it has become more entrepreneurial and responsive to schools and colleges, involving people from the business community as non-executive directors.

Overarching all the initiatives is the drive for the achievement of the new National Targets for Education and Training (NTET). This requires planning and co-ordination at sub-national level, often by TECs or EBPs, but more recently by Strategic Fora.

2.6 Conclusion

The five key areas of change have clearly influenced college–employer interaction in different ways, and are still doing so. In particular, they have influenced planning decisions and priorities to be given to different types of interaction. Their impact, however, varies from college to college, depending on local circumstances and the motivations of college managers and staff.

Most people we interviewed were aware of some of the changes but generally of only one aspect of change, not the whole picture. Some in colleges seemed unaware of the scale of the changes in terms of employer-led training or patterns of participation in particular. Others were unsure how temporary the changes might be and what weight to give them when making decisions for the future.

Some employers were unsure of the role of TECs in developing education/employer partnerships, especially in the FE sector, whilst others were not completely *au fait* with new qualifications. Yet others felt that colleges generally had been slow to embrace some of the changes in the nature and structure of employment and training which employers had been undergoing. There has been a wealth of initiatives, with associated jargon and acronyms, and this has often created a confusing picture for employers. On the other hand, the initiatives have played a role in raising awareness of the importance of college–employer interaction and responsiveness, and provided many opportunities for new contacts to be made and developments to be undertaken.

The next chapter looks more closely at the different types of interaction, how they are developing within this context of change, and the key factors which contribute to their effectiveness.

3. Interaction Involving Employers and Colleges

In this chapter we present the key findings from the case study work. It is based on interviews with staff and students in the 19 colleges, with a sample of employers which had some interaction with the colleges, and with representatives of local TECs and other relevant organisations in the six case study areas. (See the Appendix for further details of cases studies and methodology.) The interviews made use of the framework developed in Stage 1 of the project (and described earlier in Chapter 1) in order to investigate interaction in practice by:

- analysing how different types of interaction are developing
- examining the benefits to the participants
- identifying indicators of success, and
- identifying critical factors promoting or inhibiting success.

The findings for the four main types of interaction:

A. Employer-led education and training

B. Voluntary, work related activities with students

C. Advisory or planning based activities to aid individual colleges and employers

D. Local or regional planning with other organisations.

These are presented separately because they each have distinct functions, involve different kinds of staff and produce different kinds of outcomes, though, as will be seen, they do share some common issues. Then, a cross-college overview is given showing how these different types of activities interact with each other and affect college responsiveness overall. The role of TECs and other local bodies in improving interaction is dealt with under each type of interaction, but some overall conclusions are also presented.

3.1 Employer led education and training (Type A)

A. Employer-led education and training

Function: training for existing employees

Relationship: employers/employees as customers

Form: formally agreed with costs, timing, outputs specified

Examples:

Education and training
- vocational courses/training/assessment
- day-release training for employees
- on-site training of employees
- short customised courses
- NVQ assessment in the workplace
- TDLB Trainer and Assessor Awards
- basic skills provision (literacy, numeracy)
- Training Credits
- accreditation of prior achievement/learning
- open/distance learning
- training needs analysis

Resources
- use of college–employer premises, equipment, catering
- facilities for meeting, events, sports etc.

3.1.1 Activities and trends

Most employers used their local college (or occasionally more than one local college) to meet a variety of education and training needs, but a few were only using it for employee day-release training (typically to get a BTEC qualification). Most also used other private providers and, increasingly, equipment manufacturers. Very few employers used the college for senior management training, the main focus was still at technician level and below, the traditional college client group as perceived by most employers and TECs. Employers of all sectors and size groups were represented in the client base for employer-led training. Large employers in the private sector, and increasingly public sector were most likely to train, but colleges were having to deal increasingly with SMEs, partly as a consequence of there being fewer large employers than previously.

Nearly all colleges reported significant drops in employer-led part-time enrolments (in line with the national trend, as shown in section 2.2). In five of the six case study areas there had been a significant shift away from day release of young employees and towards more short customised courses of one day or more duration. These were delivered either in the college or on employers' premises for employees of all ages, and often run on

a full cost recovery basis. This shift had been caused by a combination of two main factors: a decline in apprenticeship recruitment (and youth recruitment generally) in their local area, especially in manufacturing and the building trades; and an increasing demand from employers for training of a very specific kind at a time and place which suited them best. A third factor — employer dissatisfaction with the quality of provision (*eg* too general, wide ranging; poor teaching; poorly organised) — was mentioned too, but rarely. The one case study area which bucked the general trend had strong links with a few large employers which were continuing to recruit young people and send them to college for periods of study.

The most common generic (*ie* not sector-specific) employer-led education and training, was in health and safety, applications of IT, finance and business skills, delivered as customised courses or by day-release. Specialist vocational provision varied depending on the skills required by employers in the area, and on colleges' specialist staff and equipment (*eg* hairdressing and beauty therapy, catering, electronics, power engineering, optic installations, computer aided design (CAD) and green-keeping). Open/distance learning for employers did not feature much. A few successful examples were found — one where a college provided tutorial support for employers using commercially prepared distance learning material, and another which focused on NVQ development in a few large local companies.

The issue of 'franchised' courses for employers occurred during the FEFC workshops. Some participants queried whether it was acceptable to train employees and enrol them for college courses as FEFC funded students, thus subsidising the employers' training. We did not meet explicit examples of this in the study, but it is likely to become an issue in future for colleges because it could mean that certain training could be offered to employers at little or no cost.

Day release

Day-release training (*ie* courses initiated by colleges) leading to a national qualification over 1 to 3 years, mixing employees from different companies, still existed in colleges we visited. For the majority of colleges, it had in the past been their most significant source of interaction with employers. At the larger colleges they may have had a client base of several hundred employers and several thousand employed students. This had now dropped but accurate figures were not available, as the work was not always identified as a separate entity. The decline had meant that to some extent relationships between specialist subject staff and local employers had been lost, though the effect of this loss was impossible to quantify as some had been 'replaced' by other training provision.

There was now much less day release training in the engineering sector, virtually none in the construction sector, but more in commerce, finance, and health care. There were mixed views about future trends. Some college staff felt that day release had now reached a plateau, while others saw it continuing to drop. The uncertainty was being caused by several factors — the effect of changes in TEC funding, especially for TfW and YT, with its increasing emphasis on outcome based funding; the use of Training Credits; the take up locally of the modern and accelerated apprenticeship schemes; and the extent to which colleges might be used by employers in the future for training other employees. The uncertainty stemmed from a general lack of research by most colleges about local employer needs in this area.

Day release training tended to be less of a priority for college support and development than fully costed work, in particular short course training. It was viewed as a declining area (and therefore not worth developing), tended to be less well resourced, spread across a number of departments and programmes and, as a consequence, achievements were more difficult to measure. Employers on the whole were satisfied with it, but there were some criticisms of relevance and quality, and even more about poor communication and feedback about trainees' progress (see section 3.1.3). This lack of attention to employers as 'customers' in this area and quality management on some day release courses contrasted markedly to that for customised work and consultancy, and contributed to giving some colleges in our sample a poor image with employers.

Customised training and consultancy

By contrast, customised training and consultancy work for employers was increasing in most colleges and they were actively developing it further in response to employers' requests. Growth was being encouraged by demand for TDLB Assessor training and the growth of other NVQs. Investors in People (IiP) was also mentioned as a stimulus for increasing consultancy work, as was recent legislation relating to health and safety, and European Union Directives. Often, it was seen as a prestigious area of work and backed up by senior management, specially selected staff, administrative support and quality systems. This caused some disquiet in some colleges as the relatively small revenue generated was seen by staff who were not involved with it as disproportionate to the resources devoted to it. Some examples are given below.

Example 1.

In an area of very small private employers, one college had targeted the public sector where the main large employers could be found. Successful, well established training of fire service employees and school secretaries for example, continued to develop.

Example 2.

A college lecturer was designing fibre optics equipment and systems for two large companies, as well as training their staff to use them. The money raised was used to set up a specialist college fibre optics training facility to offer national qualifications to other clients.

Example 3.

A college in an area of very small employers and high unemployment was working with a large car manufacturer in Europe to assess training needs and deliver training on the company's premises.

Example 4.

In a consortium arrangement with the local authority Social Services department, one college provided NVQ and TDLB Assessor training for over 50 small employers in the care sector at a subsidised rate. A similar consortium was being developed for the Leisure Services department.

Most colleges had chosen to develop specialist units to market and/or deliver commercial training. There was a range of practice, from one college which had hived off all its full cost recovery work (which had national and international markets) to a separate company at another location, to others which had set up Business Development Units (BDUs) within the college, and yet others which delivered it via individual departments or specific staff. In some cases, the BDUs focused exclusively on the college's full cost recovery work, while others had a broader remit for developing all college–employer interaction. There were also some examples where the college's marketing function was located in the BDU, and others where it was not.

It was not possible to evaluate which organisational models were more effective as there was little evidence of achievements, other than financial ones (where precise information was not usually forthcoming, see below), and some BDUs were only very recently established. There did appear however to be some particular problems which came up frequently in the case study colleges relating to internal communications and cross-college support. We came across a range of practice. One BDU manager had involved other college staff in the initial planning, and subsequently communicated initiatives and progress via regular internal newsletters. Another took a different stance and clearly was competing against a major faculty within his own college in providing training directly to employers. There were many others which fell between these two extremes. It was also noticeable that there was little sharing of good practice or information either within colleges or between them. The increased competitive environment tended to discourage this.

The colleges varied considerably in the amount of full cost recovery work. Most sixth form colleges (SFCs) were beginning to do a little but some did none at all and most did not see it as part of their mainstream business. It was undertaken on a much larger scale at most General FE colleges (GFCs), where some made use of college specialist staff and others brought in specialist tutors on a part-time basis. Income from this activity was beginning to be quite substantial, commonly several hundred thousand pounds, though colleges were generally reluctant to give figures, and particularly figures about profit margins. The work seemed to operate on a sound financial footing, but relative to total college budgets, it was still quite small, at well under five per cent in the majority of cases.

TECs

TECs were not greatly involved in colleges' employer-led activity, except through contracts with colleges for supply of Youth Training (YT) and Training for Work (TfW). Some had provided assistance with marketing, and other colleges had benefited from the actions of their TEC in developing IiP and small business support work. Most of the BDU managers we spoke to had very little contact with the TEC on a day-to-day basis. By and large, TECs viewed colleges as just one of a number of providers in their area and they did not warrant special treatment. Some were critical of the quality of college provision comparing them unfavourably with other providers on performance measures such as achieving NVQs, though no evidence was provided to substantiate these more negative comments.

YT and TfW involved the majority of colleges in some contracts with TECs but because of changes in funding regimes many colleges felt that YT was declining by comparison with the growth in full-time students and customised training. Whilst it did provide valuable employer interaction we were given the impression by college staff that it was given much lower status within colleges' spectrum of interaction with employers. This was partly because it did not fit neatly into colleges' traditional categories of employer-led training and partly because trainees were mostly unemployed rather than employees.

3.1.2 Beneficial outcomes

Beneficial outcomes of employer led education and training were:

- income to college
- symbol of being responsive
- improved employee performance and motivation
- skills and qualifications
- value for money.

All colleges in our case studies, with the exception of one SFC which was not involved at all in employer led training, felt that there were important benefits to colleges from all types of employer-led work. Employers were also all mostly positive in their support for the training from colleges which they had experienced. Most employers we interviewed felt that the college provided cost-effective and relevant training, with customised courses offering the specificity and flexibility which they wanted[1].

Customised training and consultancy work (full cost recovery) was viewed by colleges as a very important element of being responsive to employers, and taken by employers as a visible symbol of college responsiveness. It generated goodwill and improved status for the college among the business community.

While income was clearly one benefit of employer-led education and training, both for day release and customised courses and consultancy work (though the direct income of the former was much less than the latter) it was not the only benefit. The increased income it provided (which was still quite a small share of the college budget in any case) had to be weighed against the high level of resources it often used in the form of good quality teaching staff, managers, equipment and accommodation. Profit margins appeared to be small though mostly were unquantified. The other main benefit from the colleges' perspective was that it brought staff into close contact with industry. In particular, it ensured that their vocational skills were kept up to date.

Employers, on the other hand, saw benefits in terms of training and qualifications, which contributed towards improved employee performance, better motivation and their image as a good employer. The training provided theoretical knowledge, use of correct practices and broadening of employees' skills, and was generally seen as good value for money.

3.1.3 Critical factors promoting or inhibiting successful interaction

- Quality, cost and flexible response to employers' needs
- Communication
- Cross-college co-ordination
- Proactivity by colleges
- Specialist expertise/market niche/diversity.

---

[1] These employers had experience of college provided training; the vast majority of local employers do not and are unlikely to be as positive.

Almost all employers said that the colleges were improving in terms of responsiveness in this area, and that they were now more competitive and trying harder to give employers what they wanted. But they could be more pro-active, for example: visit companies to find out what they wanted, get to know customers better, 'understand the concept of customer care'.

For employers the most critical factors were:

- Quality and cost-effectiveness — most felt that the quality of the college staff, the equipment and the materials, and the overall cost-effectiveness of the customised training were critical to success, but were genuinely satisfied with them. Where they were paying a fully commercial rate for training (as in short courses, but not some day release where some are publicly subsidised) a high level of service was expected.
- Communication with the colleges — general problems to do with their difficulties in, *eg*, unanswered telephone calls, use of answering machines, complex telephone systems, not knowing who to contact and lack of response to queries. In particular, a substantial number of employers complained about insufficient information provided about the course content, students' progress, absences and achievements.
- A college contact person — a named person whom employers knew and with whom they had regular contact was felt to be crucial to success. This usually involved building good relationships with individuals and feeling in close contact with people in the colleges. Employees we interviewed also liked their employer to be in close contact with the college.
- Quick and flexible response to providing training to employers' requirements — some employers felt that colleges were not good at this while others took the opposite view. Main criticisms were about colleges giving too much priority to full time students' needs at the expense of others. There were also some concerns that colleges might be tempted to offer more customised and specialist work without guaranteeing that they had the staff, accommodation and time to do it to the standard that employers required.

Colleges were having to manage a sea-change in the area of employer-led training, from relatively standard day-release to more varied and fragmented customised training and consultancy. As seen above, this meant a much more personal, individualised approach. The 'rhythm' of the work was increasingly different from that of their mainstream courses. The critical factors for colleges were related to choices about how far to diversify into new work and develop new ways of working, what priorities to give it, and the internal management of staff and resources:

- Quick and flexible response to employers' requirements — colleges were aware that at times they were unable to

respond to certain demands of employers because of the demands of other students for the use of accommodation, staff and resources. Tension within colleges was usually created by full time student timetables and their use of staff and resources which could not be freed to respond to employers' requirements.

- Co-ordination and communication of the whole range of employer-led work within colleges seemed to be minimal. We found little connection made between customised and day-release work, and between customised work where it was spread throughout the college.
- Staff working only on employer-led provision — some colleges had set up discrete business units with dedicated staff and resources, but not all colleges were able or willing to do this. It was not possible to ascertain whether those which had specialist staff (either in a BDU or employed in another college area) were more successful in attracting employer-led work, although they did seem able to be more flexible about provision.
- Cost of provision, especially for SMEs — colleges believed that many SMEs could not afford, nor would pay college fees, for custom made courses. However, most SMEs we interviewed who had received customised training had not complained about the cost, but did not buy in large amounts of training; it was an issue for one or two in some areas. Open learning packages and training on their own premises had been used as cheaper options.
- Marketing and publicity — although colleges publicised their employer-led training, most staff interviewed felt that the bulk of the work was generated through repeat business, personal recommendation and following up existing clients for new work. Mailshots were not felt to be productive in most cases, and advertising yielded patchy results. On the whole there was little successful innovation in this area, in contrast to that developed for attracting full-time students.
- Niche markets — most colleges had at least one specialist vocational area of expertise and experience which brought employer-led training, and this was seen by the more successful colleges as an important factor which gave them an edge over local competition. A few colleges were national centres for this, and one or two won international contracts.
- Modularisation and unitisation of qualifications, government legislation for employers on health and safety issues, and the take-up of IiP by employers, had all been useful in helping to encourage employers to take up college training.

3.1.4 Indicators of success

From colleges' and employers' responses we have drawn up lists of their indicators of success. Some relate to the *outcomes* of

interaction, but most to the *process*. In most cases, collection or analysis of data to support these was not systematic. For some general indicators such as 'improved motivation', there was an expectation that they occurred, but a feeling that it was not possible to assess objectively.

Outcomes

The most obvious outcome indicating success was the achievement and/or qualification of the employee/trainee. Colleges also used some or all of the following in an intuitive way, but did not quantify many of these or collate information about them on a college wide basis:

- repeat business from employers
- the range and type of employers involved
- the number of enrolments for day-release work
- the amount of income (but not usually profit) from full cost recovery work.

All of these could be taken more seriously as they are not difficult to measure on a systematic basis. While we found some course evaluation being undertaken it was usually not being done in a systematic way across the college.

Employers generally did no have any systematic approaches to measuring outcomes of education and training. This applied to even the large employers or those with systematic appraisal systems. The main, rather subjective, measures they used were:

- improved performance and motivation of employees
- value for money and cost-effectiveness.

The process

Both employers and colleges used the explicit indicator of attendance and retention of trainees on courses to assess the success of the process. Employers also had more general subjective indicators, the main ones being:

- the quality of the teaching and materials
- the communication between college and employers.

Employers tended to rely more on informal feedback from the individuals being trained or from other employees. Most colleges used evaluation sheets, sometimes known as 'happy sheets' to assess employer and student satisfaction. Usually, these did not apply to day-release courses, and, as mentioned above, feedback in this area was identified as requiring improvement. There were a few examples of colleges which had developed quality standards for customised training as part of

the colleges' quality management system, and this appeared to be an increasing trend. A minority of colleges had employer charters (in addition to their college charters) which indicated what employers and students could expect in terms of standards. One TEC had helped to develop an employer charter for use by a number of colleges in its area.

3.1.5 Summary

- There has been a shift away from traditional styles of day release training at colleges which has probably led to an overall reduction in the amount of employer interaction from Type A activity though the quality of links was seen to have generally improved. The loss is unquantifiable because no systematic records have been kept over time and information on employer-led provision is not generally collated and analysed across the college.
- Related to this shift has been a change in the nature of provision towards more employer-driven, customised education and training. Most colleges have responded to this change in demand, but need to move from *ad hoc* management and planning. Quality needs to be consistent across all employer-led work.
- New work was being generated by legislation (*eg* health an safety) and new initiatives (*eg* IiP), employer demand for specific training to meet changing working practises or technology (*eg* IT updating), and NVQ assessment.
- Measurement of success was more about process than outcomes. Few measures were being used on a systematic basis to plan and monitor the quality of provision.
- Key influential factors for successful outcomes were:
  - quality, relevance and cost effectiveness of training
  - personal contact and good communication
  - colleges' ability to respond quickly and flexibly.
- Employer-led training was viewed as a much riskier area than others in terms of return on investment and there was some uncertainty in the majority of colleges about how far to develop it. Colleges were keen to do so because it brought benefits in terms of income, being visibly responsive to local employers, and keeping staff up to date with industry and commerce. However, its role as a potential major income earner, and how far to expand development, was still under consideration in many colleges.

3.2 Voluntary work related activities with students (Type B)

B. Voluntary work-related activity with students

Function: providing non-employed students with contact with employers

Relationship: employer as resource, students as beneficiaries

Form: informal, voluntary activities at course or individual level

Examples:

Work placement and experience
- work placements/shadowing/experience for students
- use of employers' staff/accommodation/resources for mock interviews

Curriculum development
- taking part in work simulations/assignments
- teaching vocational subjects/projects
- help with devising/assessing college assignments
- assistance/training in Enterprise programmes

Resources
- location/time/staff for assignments based in the workplace
- recording of achievement in the workplace
- allow use of premises for meetings, events etc.
- setting up workplace visits
- donation/presentation of prizes
- gifts of money/equipment
- sponsorship of students/resources/activities

3.2.1 Activities and trends

Work based activities such as work experience, work shadowing, work based projects, involving employers on a voluntary basis, were being undertaken in most of the employing organisations and all the colleges we interviewed. They were the most prevalent of all the types of activity in this group and seemed to have the biggest impact on colleges, students and employers. They were also undergoing considerable change. Other activities identified included careers fairs, visits to employers and sponsorship of events or resources by employers, and although these were important to the individual involved, they seemed to be more sporadic and on a much smaller scale.

The findings below concentrate on student activities directly with employers in the workplace. The activities we investigated varied from college to college and within colleges. They were usually part of a wide range of full-time programmes mostly with 17 to 19 year olds but also occasionally with mature students.

Colleges' provision

There had been an increase for all colleges in the development of work experience because of both the increase in numbers of full time students, and the introduction of GNVQs. College staff saw the demands of the GNVQ as requiring an integrated period of work experience and/or work related assignments, despite the fact that it is not a mandatory part of the qualification. If anything, their belief in its value was growing. For SFCs this has had to be developed more quickly because previously they had fewer vocational courses. Most were growing their links with employers via local intermediary bodies and initiatives such as Young Enterprise, Compacts, Understanding British Industry, and Business in the Community. The use of intermediary bodies was more common in SFCs than in most GFCs.

In all cases, college staff generally relied on existing employer contacts which had been maintained over long periods, but they were constantly having to find new ones because of both an increase in student numbers and the new requirements of courses and qualifications. Employers were under increasing pressure from education to participate in student work based activities because of the increased volume of requests from all parts of the education sector, especially schools.

Colleges, and especially the SFCs, seemed more aware than previously of the need for aspiring HE students to acquire some business awareness and interpersonal skills before going on to HE. Within SFCs in particular, more 'A' level students were taking up work experience as a way of looking at a prospective career before going on to HE. Certain 'A' level boards were being selected by college staff because of a more applied, practical approach which could be linked to a work placement *eg* in science, IT, or business.

Most activities involved first year 'A' level or advanced GNVQ, with some at intermediate GNVQ, Level 2 NVQ and BTEC HNC levels. Usually, the approach was to have a voluntary scheme for 'A' level students and a mandatory one for vocational students. Projects in all colleges where students worked on a company problem or activity were becoming more popular in 'A' level and GNVQ, and generated a lot of enthusiasm from students, and from employers who often had a specific task done for them. Some SMEs we interviewed said they would probably not have spent money on consultants but found that students carried out tasks to a professional level and the students felt a very real pride in their achievements.

Work placement officers on the model of some YT training were being used in some colleges to provide some central administrative support and find new placements. They were generally seen to be effective by employers and college staff.

Employers' involvement

Employers interviewed were engaged in a wide range of voluntary activity, not just with colleges but with primary schools, secondary schools and universities, in some cases taking work placement students from other countries. Most did not give colleges priority over these other contacts unless they used the colleges for significant amounts of training. The largest sphere of activity was offering a placement to a student for work experience, but projects in the workplace and work shadowing seemed to be increasing.

Employers' other voluntary activities included donating college prizes, sponsoring competitions (*eg* in art and music) as well as in vocational subjects, attending exhibitions and careers conventions, sponsoring rooms/buildings/sports teams *etc.*, advising on enterprise and other projects, hosting student visits to the workplace, allowing the workplace and equipment to be used by students, or donating materials and equipment to the college. Some employers stated that they preferred to do these types of activities rather than donate cash to colleges and schools. The colleges interviewed benefited from all these activities although it was not possible to uncover the full extent of them during the research (see examples).

Example 1

One college offered a *quid pro quo* to employers by providing some free training and consultancy to two catering companies in return for the guarantee of work placements for students.

Example 2

A work shadowing scheme offered at an SFC enabled students to see high level professional jobs at close quarters. The students got a better idea of their potential future job than on work experience and 85 per cent of 'A' level students took part. The quality of the placements was a selling point to potential students, parents and HE.

Example 3

Advanced GNVQ Information Technology students worked on individual projects, each solving an employer's IT needs. The students helped to set up the projects by visiting the workplace. Time spent on them was variable and flexible over a year. TEC funding helped the initial staff and development time. There is now a waiting list of employers who would like a student.

Example 4

A college refectory and boardroom have been refurbished and sponsored by employers. One is a high street bank, the other an international design company run by ex-students.

3.2.2 Beneficial outcomes

Beneficial outcomes of voluntary work related activities were:

- students' increased knowledge of jobs and careers
- improved core skills and confidence of students
- college staff updating and awareness
- colleges reach a large number of employers
- focus for employers' altruism
- improved company profile.

The main direct benefits were obviously to students. The students interviewed were involved in a range of activities, usually work experience, a work based project or assignment or shadowing and mainly were very positive overall about them. The beneficial outcomes they identified were largely the same regardless of type of activity. The main ones related to improving career decisions, increasing the relevance of their course and improving the core skills of communication, problem solving, and working with people, especially adults. Most said that their experience had heightened their desire to go into the area of work for which they were studying, while some were glad to have seen that an area of work was not for them. Those wishing to go on to university had found their work experience beneficial when being interviewed. Some hoped that it would help in job-seeking, but low levels of recruitment currently meant that there were few examples of this actually happening, though employers had provided references which students found useful.

The main motivation for college staff getting involved in this type of activity was because they felt it to be worthwhile for the students. There was very little in the way of direct incentives to individual college staff to organise this work and it usually imposed an additional burden of work, but they recognised the important outcomes for them professionally, for the students, and for the college in terms of widening the range of employers in contact with the college (in particular SMEs). They felt it kept them up to date and aware of business and local labour market developments in their vocational area. For some college staff it was the main contact they had with employers. There were also examples of spin-offs which had developed from the original work experience contact, *eg* direct training, employer advisory groups for course development, sponsorship of prizes, and so on. This appeared to happen mostly in an *ad hoc* way and was not approached systematically by most colleges.

While college staff were inclined to believe that having a student in the workplace helped employers by providing a source of cheap labour, only a few employers, usually SMEs, mentioned this as a benefit. Most employers wanted to help young people

and many said that they wanted to *'put something back into the community'* or that *'working with young people gives us a buzz'*. Having a student could be a difficult form of interaction for many employers but one they considered most worthwhile. Altruism as a motivating factor has also been recognised in other research on employer-education links (see for example Hillage, 1995[1]). Some employers also wanted to pass on their own enthusiasm and let young people know about a career in their own particular industry.

All employers felt that their company profile and image improved as a consequence of this kind of community activity, both in terms of their reputation as an employer and as a form of product placement. This was particularly important for SMEs in areas where the communities were small. According to one small employer, *'it is much better than advertising'*. In the case of some SFCs which were well known in the community and seen as high quality, successful institutions, several employers specifically stated that it was beneficial to them to be associated with this success.

A significant minority of employers identified some employee benefits, *eg* giving junior managerial staff the task of organising or supervising the student's placement or project, providing a break in the work pattern and motivating employees who were involved. Selection and recruitment of potential employees was also mentioned as a beneficial outcome and most had employed students (albeit very small numbers) via this method. However, while they looked favourably at students who had had work experience it was only one of several criteria used for selection.

3.2.3 Critical factors promoting or inhibiting successful interaction

- Matching student and employer needs
- Good preparation and planning
- Liaison and communication
- Student and employee attitudes
- College time and resources

The most important factor for students was the relevance of the activity or placement to their course or career. They also mentioned the attitude of employees at the workplace — *ie* being shown how to do things, treated like an adult, not rushing explanations, given responsibility for a task. The latter gave them a great sense of achievement when satisfactorily completed.

---

[1] *Employers' Views of Education Business Links*, J Hillage, K Hyndley, G Pike, IES 1995.

What was considered most important by employers and college staff was the student and how prepared they were to get involved and show initiative. Ideally employers wanted students who were reliable and punctual, with good communication skills and motivation, who understood about the pressures of the workplace and standards and behaviour expected of them. For employers it was also important that communication with the college was effective. They specifically liked personal contact with the college, usually by telephone. They preferred personal contact to letters or packs of materials which they did not feel they had time to read and understand. Most employers were complimentary about the staff they dealt with, but some felt that some college staff were lacking a professional attitude to employers eg did not reply to calls, send information or let them know dates or times.

Good preparation was a key requirement and it was very important to students and employers that placement was a good match. Some students felt that they would like more say in choice of employers, and more involvement in the planning and preparation, in particular knowing more in advance about the workplace. The sending of CVs, mock interviews and preliminary visits had been very helpful to those students and employers who had done this. Some colleges expected their students to find their own placements.

Timing of placements was increasingly causing employers problems, especially where all students had the same block at the same time each year, limiting the numbers employers could take.

From the college perspective, allocating sufficient time and resources to prepare work experience properly was an important ingredient for success. Very few had a time allowance for this work but if they did, the caseload was viewed as being too large. Administrative support was considered inadequate in almost all colleges. Examples included operating out of shared staffrooms with limited access to telephones to make arrangements, no one to take calls whilst they were teaching, and problems getting documents typed and copied.

Travel cost and availability created problems in most colleges, especially in some vocational subjects, *eg* design, media and tourism, where students had to travel much further to find placements or live away from home. Inevitably some placements were selected on the basis of convenience for travel and this was not always satisfactory. Problems at the workplace were sometimes not communicated to the college early enough. This was generally not seen as a lack of monitoring but those involved at the workplace trying to work through the problem first rather than telling anyone. An important issue for colleges in certain areas was the reluctance by employers to accept their equal opportunities obligations.

3.2.4 Indicators of success

The main *outcomes* which indicated success for students and colleges were:

- completed projects or achievement of work towards a qualification
- improved core skills and improved coursework
- increased motivation of students
- better career choices.

The last two were claimed by college staff and students but no evidence was presented to show this. In colleges the means by which evidence of success was collected was becoming increasingly formalised. This was particularly where the activity had to be assessed towards a qualification. They also had systems to monitor and evaluate the process of interaction which included feedback from employers and students via reports, review meetings and presentations from students.

Employers interviewed did not quantify successful outcomes from these voluntary activities but placed great importance on the success of the *process* of the activity (see above 3.2.3). Evidence was usually provided by informal feedback from staff at the workplace, but indicators such as attendance, punctuality, or sometimes appearance of students, could also be used to assess success.

A common implicit indicator of success for all participants was the lack of any problems.

3.2.5 Summary

- Work-related activities on a voluntary basis with employers were increasing and considered to be an important activity by colleges and employers alike. Quality was generally praised but college time allocation and administrative support structures could all be improved to ensure good communication and preparation of students and employees.
- Employers expected a professional approach from colleges and good preparation, matching and briefing of students. More personal contact with college staff would be welcomed; this characterised the more successful examples in our case studies. It can have consequences, however, on the amount of resources devoted to this activity.
- Employers usually got involved for altruistic reasons rather than for reasons of future recruitment or 'an extra pair of hands'. They were under increasing pressure from a number of education establishments in the area to provide work placements, and colleges increasingly found themselves in competition with schools. There was a tendency for colleges

to rely on existing employer contacts because it was time consuming to find and set up placements at new employers, and there was little sharing of contacts within the college.

- Students were generally positive about their experience. They welcomed projects which integrated the work-related activity and their course work. The development of these projects, and an increasing trend to assess the activities towards a final qualification, meant that the work was becoming more complex and time consuming to set up at college and the workplace. Work shadowing was easier to 'sell' to employers and was popular with employers and 'A' level students in particular.

3.3 Advisory and planning based interaction for individual colleges and employers (Type C)

C. Advisory and planning based interaction for individual colleges/employers

Function: planning within individual organisations

Relationship: college and employer as mutual sources of information and advice

Form: mixture of formal groups and informal personal contact

Examples:

Employers' advice to colleges
- governing body membership
- advisory group membership
- task or focus groups
- mentoring/careers advice
- advice on curriculum/resources/strategic planning
- responses to customer satisfaction surveys
- personal contact through other activities
- employers lunches/meetings
- teacher placements in industry

Colleges' advice and information to employers
- advice on qualifications/funding
- help with recruitment and selection
- information about education and training developments
- work-related research projects

3.3.1 Activities and trends

Type C individual college–employer interaction included two main kinds: the formal kind — college governing bodies and curriculum review/programme advisory groups; and more informal personal interaction, some of it generated from learner centred interaction such as work placements. These activities took similar forms in all colleges, but there were also some variations. They also varied in their degrees of influence and

success. The advice was not always seen a one-way route from employers to colleges, although this predominated. Through taking part in the activities, employers were also the recipients of advice and information about education and training in general, or in relation to their own companies.

The most common formal kind of interaction was obviously the requirement for employer and TEC membership of governing bodies, with which all colleges had complied. Employer governors were seen as important to the college as a whole, in particular their professional skills and expertise as business managers were valued in providing support to the management and development of the college. Their role as regards responsiveness in general, and college–employer interaction specifically, was less clear. There were few examples of ways in which employer governors had directly stimulated new kinds of interaction, though they clearly had done so indirectly through their involvement in college strategic planning, encouraging the college to take up new initiatives, or in specific working groups on curricular development.

All colleges had some form of curriculum advisory groups. In FE colleges the advisory groups were usually vocationally specific, but in most SFCs consisted of one single industrial liaison forum (of 50+ employees) though some also had subject specific groups. At some colleges, the advisory groups had not attracted employers to attend regularly and they were in the process of rethinking and reforming them to improve effectiveness. Some had been informally allowed to disappear altogether, but for many college staff the most common source of advice from employers was the large amount of informal contact generated by learner-centred activities or personal relationships.

Advice and information from employers about their needs or satisfaction with the college came from surveys. These were usually carried out by the college marketing staff, but only a few colleges had done any surveys which were being used for strategic planning purposes. Many more were proposing to do so. One college in particular had undertaken a large survey via their BDU which had involved personal visits to over 250 employers. This had generated a wealth of information which was being used to develop a marketing strategy and (unusually) was being shared across the college. It is now planning a follow-up, re-visiting all the employers which had previously participated in their survey. This level of survey activity was the exception rather than the rule.

Variations on the main types of interaction were small-scale but often successful. A few, for example, had set up task or focus groups consisting of employers and college staff, not only to advise, but to plan a specific task relating to new curricular developments. One such group had effectively introduced a new admissions policy with special emphasis on APL (accredited

prior learning); another had formed a consortium of 12 local companies and two universities to develop an advanced GNVQ in manufacturing. A few colleges were successful in operating other regular events for employers which were well attended — usually lunchtime or early evening meetings, and a handful of employers and college staff, mainly from SFCs, had taken part in teacher placement schemes in industry. Some examples are shown below.

Example 1

One college ran a series of business lunches several times a year mostly in a local hotel, with an average of 80 employers attending out of 200 members. The agenda was very specifically geared to employers' needs and they set the programme. The college benefited indirectly by hosting the events, being seen to be a key professional organisation and making contacts for future business for college courses.

Example 2

A large manufacturing company and an SFC met to plan and jointly develop a GNVQ in Manufacturing. Company employees and college staff were jointly writing assignments and teaching/supervising students in the workplace. Regular meetings meant that problems were identified and trust and understanding built up.

Example 3

In addition to specific course advisory boards, an FE college operated Focus Groups for a small number of employers plus the Careers Service. They were invited to attend to discuss a topic such as college information to employers, or college facilities. The employers gave their views in an informal discussion. The college had made changes in response.

3.3.2 Beneficial outcomes

The benefits of advisory and planning based interaction for individual colleges and employers were:

- improves relevance of college provision
- employers help the local community
- provides information and advice about local industry
- management expertise and specialist skills support college management.

These benefits were generally ones which were to be expected and almost impossible to quantify. Some of activities such as curriculum advisory groups were seen as necessary, but their outcomes varied in their actual usefulness to colleges. There was

a rather cynical feeling in places that they had to be seen to be doing them, and the beneficial outcomes stated were sometimes more about the expectation than the reality.

Senior college staff clearly were aware of the benefits from having employer governors, in terms of using their expertise and specialist skills (*eg* finance, or personnel management) in the college's development now they were independent corporations. Other staff, however, were unaware of any specific benefits and it was difficult for them to show to us how it had improved their responsiveness.

Employers did not expect direct benefits from this kind of interaction, although some felt that it was useful to them in terms of keeping in touch with education and training developments and opportunities to meet with other employers. The main motivating factor was a desire to help and influence the college and the community, by ensuring that young people gained appropriate skills and qualifications. Some felt that an advisory group was a tangible way of achieving this if managed effectively; others preferred to work through their contacts in training or work related activities.

3.3.3 Critical factors promoting or inhibiting successful interaction

- Focused, task based activities
- Personal relationships
- Mutual understanding of colleges'/employers' needs.

A critical factor for employers interviewed was how far the activities were focused or task based. They wanted to have targets and objectives to work towards, rather than just receive information from colleges. Activities for which there was a specific purpose were generally better supported (*eg* setting up a GNVQ or Modern Apprenticeship scheme). Informal lunches or meetings were successful only if they were geared to employers' interests, *eg* with presentations from industrialists and experts.

There was a perceived need to improve the management of some college meetings. Employers often found curriculum advisory meetings too vague and time-consuming, and complained about the amount of paperwork, the use of educational jargon, and poor organisation. College governors on the other hand had to give significant amounts of time but felt that their contribution was particularly important and valued, and there was little such criticism here.

As in other activities, personal contact and relationships between employers and colleges were important. In governing bodies or advisory groups, mostly college senior and middle managers were involved as were senior members of companies.

Success in this area was often put down to the vision, drive and personalities of individuals. While most employers felt that there were more individuals in colleges which had the right combination of skills to develop this area, there was also mention of staff who remained out of touch with new industrial practices and did not show much interest in getting more involved.

Employers were often criticised by colleges for their lack of understanding of education and training, especially the demands of qualifications and awarding bodies. It was also felt that some employers had too high an expectation of their influence on the curriculum. Employers, on the other hand, complained about the constant changes in education and training. There appeared to be the need for better mutual understanding to encourage greater co-operation.

Finally, it was easier for companies to get involved in advisory activities where senior management gave encouragement and support. Colleges found it hard to involve more employers because some companies had become very inward looking owing to downsizing, restructuring and lower recruitment in recent years.

3.3.4 Indicators of success

Successful *outcomes* for employers and colleges were:

- tasks successfully completed
- changes to college courses or curriculum
- colleges becoming more responsive.

Only the first could be evaluated explicitly, the others being more general and subjective, and difficult to attribute to the interaction. The indicators of success relating to the *process* of the activities revolved around having clear targets, well-managed activities and effective individuals, but they were not explicit.

Indicators of success for colleges

- number and type of employers on governing body
- range of college activities which involve employers
- existence of advisory groups/employers' forum
- frequency/regularity of meetings of advisory groups
- attendance of employers at advisory activities
- number and range of college staff involved in activities with employers
- number of visits to individual employers (all levels of staff)

Colleges felt that it was possible to get some kind of numerical picture of the amount of activity in this area to give some idea of success (see box above), but few actually did so. There was little evaluation of the outcomes of the activities and no overall evaluation by colleges of exactly how advisory and planning activities helped them to become more responsive:

3.3.5 Summary

- There was seen to be some value in these sort of advisory activities but they varied in their effectiveness and there was little evaluation of what they achieved.
- Where college and company senior managers took part, *eg* in governing bodies, they provided a mutual source of information and advice, and employer governors provided valuable specialist skills and expertise. However, information did not seem to feed back to lower levels of companies or colleges. Governors were not seen by most college staff (below senior levels) as having a strategic or influential role in their activities.
- Informal contacts provided a number of college staff with detailed but partial labour market intelligence in their own sector. For the most part this was not collated or fed back to the college marketing staff or senior managers in any systematic way. The exception were some vocational departments which prepared their own parts of the college strategic plan.
- Advisory groups of some sort were still seen as necessary by employers and colleges and new models and formats were needed and being developed. These were more likely to be real partnerships where employers had more influence in setting the agenda and took a more active role. The task based groups where employers were helping to develop curricula or programmes with colleges were seen by all participants as successful but were a relatively new phenomenon.

3.4 Advisory and planning based interaction at local/regional level (Type D)

D. Advisory and planning-based interaction at local/regional level

Function: planning in the wider context

Relationship: employer and college as part of local/national provision of a skilled workforce

Form: senior staff in mostly formal meetings with other bodies

Examples:

Strategic planning
gathering and providing information (NTETs, labour markets, demographic data)

assessing local/national training needs
analysis of data to plan provision
joint planning to meet local needs

Information and liaison
liaison with other training providers and employers
liaison with advisory services (Careers Service, Job Centres, TAPs, LENS)
taking part in joint workshops/training
membership of partnership arrangements/computer matching service
joining/supporting business clubs

Funding
ensuring provision of appropriate training
sponsoring pilot projects
joint bids for funding

3.4.1 Activities and trends

The type and level of activity under this heading varied from area to area and college to college, as did the involvement of the TEC and other intermediaries. It was probably the area of greatest inter-college variability in the classification framework. In some areas, there was activity based around broad objectives such as regional and local economic planning and development, with colleges well represented on a range of committees and working groups. In others there was little such activity and involvement by FE sector staff. Most college staff below senior management level had only vague knowledge of their TEC and almost no involvement with it. In some areas, only certain colleges got involved in local planning or development activities which had the effect of increasing suspicions and fuelling the competition which already existed between colleges in the area.

On the whole, this area of activity appeared complex, fragmented, and in a state of flux. Activities were often geared to national priorities and focused on specific initiatives such as Youth Training, Training for Work, the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme. There was often a complex web of local groups which the colleges (or parts of them) might or might not be involved with. In the time available it was difficult to understand fully the functions of all the groups and networks which were in place and the value of them for the employers and colleges in the local area. Many were in the process of change. Some had a focus of economic regeneration whilst others were developing joint bids for funds from national sources and Europe.

In the case of employers, it was mainly representatives of large companies who were involved in these activities, especially 'prestigious' local companies, with a few SMEs who were particularly active. In both companies and colleges, it was senior managers who were mainly involved, and often just principals and chief executives.

Conferences, workshops or courses run by TECs to provide information or updating about developments and initiatives

were mostly well received by employers and colleges. These did reach some SMEs and occasionally college staff below senior management. Some colleges had used contacts with other local organisation such as Local Authority Planning Departments and the Careers Service for information to aid planning.

Recent developments

Two forms of interaction had recently been introduced nationally, but seemed to have made little impact at the time the interviews were conducted. Firstly, the process of TECs approving college strategic plans. The most common model found in the study was that colleges drew up their plans and presented them as a *fait accompli* to TECs. The TECs saw a need to have a more formative collaborative process for the next plans but the colleges were on the whole less enthusiastic. A few colleges had drawn up their strategic plans with advice from employers and had found this helpful.

The second requirement was for TECs to provide colleges with local labour market information so that colleges could take account of this in their planning and development. The TECs were providing information which was being used by college senior managers to some extent in drawing up strategic plans which had to show how colleges intended to be responsive to the wider community. However the LMI was considered, by most colleges and some TECs, as not sufficiently detailed to be useful and it needed to be improved. Many staff we interviewed in colleges had not seen the LMI, and most of those who had did not find it particularly useful or in some cases knew how to use it. The recent developments outlined in Chapter 2 relating to LMI guidance to colleges were not yet in place, but should bring about some improvements here.

3.4.2 Beneficial outcomes

The benefits of advisory and planning based interaction at local/regional level were:

- insight into local needs
- keeping in touch with local/regional/national developments
- influencing decisions
- raised college profile.

Colleges who were more involved in Type D activities found those of a more local nature important for the college as a whole. They gained an insight into local employers' future needs and regional plans for development, changes or cutbacks, which directly helped their strategic planning work. Other benefits were less directly related to college planning activities. They included:

- information/updating — *eg* some TECs provided programmes of local events and development
- involvement in key developments — national and regional developments which often added prestige and brought additional funds to the college
- raised college profile — being involved in external planning and development activities gave the college a higher profile with the business community and was a way of demonstrating their responsiveness
- spin-off — wider networking in this way helped to spread information about the college to a wider audience thus creating new business opportunities.

Employers we interviewed were motivated to take part in the activities because of a genuine desire to improve and enhance the education and training system in their area, and particularly raise educational standards. Some felt that they had an obligation to the community as a whole. Other more indirect benefits, though not major motivators, included obtaining:

- information and advice from TEC staff
- contacts with other employers and training providers
- information on new initiatives and funding.

3.4.3 Critical factors promoting or inhibiting success

For TECs and others who organised activities to help local or regional planning, it was important to their success to get commitment from employers, but less so from colleges. The critical factors influencing the commitment of those interviewed centred around what the activities were likely to achieve, and how well they were organised. This included:

- focused, structured meetings — both employers and colleges felt it was important to have joint achievable goals which were made clear and which were relevant to both participants. There were examples quoted of meetings and committees for which the actual purpose was unclear to participants and described as 'talking shops'.
- achievements and outcomes — employers who attended meetings or working groups wanted to see something actually achieved. Examples were cited of TEC organised meetings which people had attended over long periods, putting in a lot of time and expertise, but where little had been achieved. They were demotivated by this and less inclined to get involved again.

The variety of new initiatives in education and training caused difficulties for employers, colleges and TECs and was the most criticised aspect in this area of activity. Employers in particular

thought that there were just too many different things going on and were unable to make sense of the procedures required to get involved. There could be conflict for colleges and employers between responding to national priorities and meeting their own local needs.

A supportive TEC which understood and supported the college's role in the business community was important to colleges. Some felt that they had been hampered in doing more because this was not the case, and some TECs showed a lack of interest in colleges.

3.4.4 Indicators of success

Colleges had examples of successful *outcomes*, for example funding from the TEC or a contract for a prestigious initiative. These were only seen as indicators of success for a few, and possibly the more prestigious employers, who wanted to be involved in a high profile national initiative. Successful outcomes for employers were a demonstration of increased responsiveness to employers' needs by education and training, which was based largely on subjective judgement, and whether certain tasks had been completed or projects put into operation.

Another key indicator relating to the *process* was the relevance and effectiveness of meetings. Employers, but less so college staff, had to justify spending time attending them.

Colleges were able to provide some indicators of success from a numerical picture of the amount of activity (see box below) but few were using information of this type in a systematic way for business planning. The exception was the amount of funding from TECs or other local initiatives.

Indicators of success for colleges

- type and level of college representation on local/regional committees
- number of staff who attend employer bodies' functions *eg* Chamber of Commerce
- amount of involvement with large/prestigious employers
- amount of funding/contracts for the college from TEC or other initiatives
- level of influence college has on regional activities
- greater responsiveness of education to employment issues.

One of the problems in this type of activity was the uncertainty about what was meant by responsiveness, which in turn meant that it was difficult for the participants to judge success. Some

colleges felt that FEFC could provide better guidance on what was expected.

3.4.5 Summary

- The local and regional activities did not play a central role in most college–employer interaction. Their impact appeared to be small in comparison to other forms of interaction between colleges and employers. Any resulting funding or initiatives also involved only very small numbers, usually the very committed.
- It was usually only the large or active employers who were involved and these were not necessarily representative of the area as a whole. Those involved from colleges were usually only the principal or one or two other senior staff, and the activities often remained isolated from the mainstream of college life.
- Most TECs did not feel that the colleges were key players in some of their priority activities (*eg* Investors in People, training for the unemployed, work placements for schools). However, they often did not realise the size and scope of college work in the locality and the increasing extent to which it impinges upon TEC activities.
- Benefits to colleges included improving understanding of the local environment, opportunities to influence local decisions and raising their profile locally, while most employers participated because they wanted to improve educational standards, and thus the quality of their future workforce.
- The activities often included meetings or workshops, sometimes without clearly focused objectives. In many cases, the time needed to be given up, and the lack of any tangible benefits to colleges or employers, did not encourage involvement. There was conflict sometimes between responding to national priorities and initiatives rather than meeting the local or regional needs in their own way. Events giving information and updating were more popular and reached more employers and college staff.
- This area of involvement appeared to be characterised by a complex web of local groups, meetings and events, whose functions were often unclear and overlapping. In particular, the functions and roles of the TECs and others in relation to, for example, strategic planning for education and training, stimulating and meeting employers' needs, economic regeneration, were often unclear to colleges and employers and had led to confusion and fragmentation.

3.5 Overview of college–employer interaction

All colleges were active in developing links with employers and they were, by and large, perceived to be improving levels of

responsiveness. Improving responsiveness *per se* was not usually the motivation for most activities. Other forces drove colleges' activities — *eg* they were being done because it seemed right for the students, because there was a need to increase income or student enrolments, or in response to national qualification requirements and FEFC inspection or funding directives.

The amount of employer interaction and its relative success varied considerably from college to college. They were at different stages of development and had chosen to adopt different approaches to increasing responsiveness. At one end of the spectrum, for example, was a college which had successfully taken a more holistic approach, researching employer needs and satisfaction with all college provision and co-ordinating/monitoring employer interaction across the college. Others (the more common model) chose to have a separate business or enterprise unit to market the college's services to employers and provide customised training, and yet others took a lower profile approach, with many activities with employers in the hands of individual lecturers, and encouraged as 'a good thing to do'.

The amount and nature of interaction with employers was influenced by a number of internal and external factors. Internally, although there was no one model of best practice, the most noticeable factors were the attitudes and motivation of staff and management, the organisational structure of the college and the historical base of interaction. Externally, it was the local environment, including quite often the presence of a prestigious large employer who was supportive of the college, and the nature of local economic activity. In all except one area there was a growing number of SMEs and non-industrial companies involved with colleges in most areas of activity. Most college–employer interaction carried on with little involvement with TECs or EBPs, although in a minority of cases these were innovative and active in forging employer-education links.

It was difficult to assess which of Type A or B learner centred activities was more likely overall to involve more students/employees/trainees and employers because of a lack of comparable data collated across colleges. But for the majority of colleges, Type B appeared to be the most significant source of interaction between individual college staff and local employers. The greatest change, however, was in Type A (employer led work) and this is where there is the greatest potential for future growth and increased college responsiveness. The GFCs tended to have a wider range of interaction activity than the SFCs which were more likely to concentrate on Type B and C activities, *ie* offering work related activities, and advisory groups with only small-scale Type A employer led work.

In the majority of colleges, the activities appeared to be successful but their development suffered from a lack of coherence, the effects of which were seen in the lack of

connection between activities, few spin-offs, poor staff communications and little sharing of information between departments or individual staff. Indeed, we found examples of direct intra-college competition for employer led business which cannot be healthy for progress in the longer term, and staff being over-protective about their own employer contacts for fear of losing their 'special relationship' with some employers.

We found it extremely difficult to get an overall assessment of responsiveness because no one person had sufficient information or experience of all college–employer activities, and no evaluation of effectiveness was made at college level. There were few systems in place which collated appropriate information across the college. Nor was information of this kind available as input into the business planning process. Until colleges are clearer about the overall scale of employer interaction and its outcomes in terms of responsiveness, it will not be possible for them to see how they can prioritise and manage it more effectively.

It was unusual for one person at senior management level to have responsibility for developing college responsiveness and quality management in all college–employer interaction. It was usually divided between two or more assistant principals. Business development or marketing managers tended to be appointed at a lower level.

3.6 The role of TECs

Considering the overall scale of interaction with local employers, it was surprising that TECs did not have more involvement with colleges. The pattern varied across the country. Some had much better relationships with college staff, and put more effort into building links than others. The TECs in our case studies had given useful financial support, albeit mostly small scale (and, in the eyes of the colleges, insufficient), for development projects and via WRFE programmes. Their surveys of employer needs had been helpful, though not usually used by most colleges in a significant way in their business planning. As mentioned above, TEC supplied LLMI was not as effective as it might be, nor were colleges clear about how far they should use it to influence their provision. Colleges had generated most of their new employer-led work and work-based activities for students with little if any support from TECs.

One of the main criticisms of TECs was their inconsistency. For example, some TECs had supplied employer contact information to colleges while others refused to do so on the grounds of confidentiality. One TEC had been instrumental in developing a consortium of four colleges to market and deliver training to employers, while in other TEC areas colleges were treated with some suspicion. TECs were planning to apply their own quality

standards for employer led training and this was resented by some colleges.

The multiple role that TECs could have, being a partner in development of a joint activity, directly advising on college planning and the 'paymaster' for substantial (but declining) amounts of YT and TfW training was a source of confusion and difficulty for both parties. Their role in approving strategic plans had been limited and some colleges were happy for it to remain so. Colleges were also unclear about their own and the TEC's and others' roles in *eg* stimulating or meeting employers' needs, or in encouraging economic regeneration in their area.

On the whole, there was a lack of awareness among TEC education staff about the extent of college–employer interaction and the growing importance of FE colleges as major suppliers of vocational training to employers in their localities. The traditional view of colleges as mainly low level education providers to 16 to 19 year olds still prevails in places. From the employer and college perspective, TECs are still viewed by some as relatively recent arrivals, rather bureaucratic and expensively resourced, offering little to their existing relationships. There would appear to be a need for closer contact between TECs and colleges if only too raise awareness of the changes that are taking place in each type of organisation.

4. Conclusions and Recommended Areas for Action

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed the findings of the project in some detail. These provided an understanding of the range and scope of college–employer interaction, the beneficial outcomes, and the factors which promote or inhibit success. We have also shown how interaction is changing and the factors affecting it. In this chapter we highlight the main conclusions, and make recommendations for more effective interaction which could lead to increased college responsiveness. These are discussed under six headings:

- understanding the volume and nature of interaction
- managing changes in employer-led education and training
- valuing work related activities with students
- colleges' responsiveness within the wider community
- TECs and college responsiveness
- indirect responsiveness.

4.2 Understanding the volume and nature of interaction

The study found evidence of a great deal of college–employer interaction in all areas of the classification. At individual employer, college and learner level, participants stated many beneficial outcomes. This in itself might indicate responsiveness, but there is a need for a closer analysis, and it was clear from the interviews that college senior staff did not have a full or clear picture of all the interaction in their own colleges, or its effectiveness. This was partly because the activities operated differently in various parts of the college, but it was also because there was a lack of central leadership and responsibility for college–employer interaction as a whole, and information about interaction with employers was not centrally collected or co-ordinated. This fragmentation would seem to be a crucial issue, and is addressed in three ways which are detailed below.

4.2.1 Collection and analysis of college data

Very early in the project it emerged that colleges did not know the number of employers with whom they interacted, the size of the companies, the main industrial sectors they represented and the type of activity with each. This meant that they had only a partial understanding of patterns and trends. Neither were there clear and agreed measures of success. For example, in employer-led education and training, staff were usually unaware of the overall income or profit derived from training; in work related activities, most colleges could not quantify the percentage of staff and students involved across the college, or the attendance or dropout rates. This meant that they did not have baselines from which to plan or monitor changes.

Recommended areas for action:

An audit and analysis of all *interaction within each college and a database of employers, showing sector, size and activities, would be a valuable marketing, management and planning tool. If the amount of activity, and evidence of interaction were more visible, this would help to demonstrate to others (eg TECs, employers, FEFC) the extent of colleges' responsiveness. Quantifying the amount of income/cost/profit of the different types of employer led work would facilitate planning.*

4.2.2 Evaluating effectiveness

It is important to understand how much of an activity is going on but it is also important to understand how effectively it is managed, and whether the different participants or stakeholders have benefited from it. Quality standards usually only applied to full cost recovery work with employers, although most colleges had some methods of evaluating other interaction, *eg* evaluation sheets, reports, review meetings and presentations from students. These were becoming increasingly formalised, particularly where the activity had to be assessed towards a qualification, but they differed between college departments and implementation was patchy. Apart from employees achieving qualifications, colleges and employers interviewed did not quantify successful outcomes from most interaction, although some were considering doing so. Employers placed great importance on the success of the **process** of the activity which they monitored via informal feedback from their staff.

Recommended areas for action:

There is a need for clearly stated indicators of success and minimum quality standards for all the types of college–employer interaction. These should be developed in conjunction with employers and learners. Feedback from evaluation by participants should be collected and analysed across the whole college. This would help colleges to be clearer about the effectiveness of activities and how they could be improved.

4.2.3 Co-ordination and sharing of information

Successful interaction is going on, often in a structured and organised way, but the many activities operate in isolation both within and between college departments. Some colleges, especially SFCs, were moving towards the centralised co-ordination of information and centralised administrative systems. This was partly because SFCs had fewer students and employers, but also because their main focus was work related activities with students. Some colleges had administrative staff setting up and maintaining databases of employers offering work experience, or finding new work placements. This was considered a cost-effective and efficient way of working, because it avoided duplication of effort in keeping records, difficulties caused by employers being contacted by more than one department, and provided some baseline data from which to improve.

Although activities with employers were mainly implemented through FE college departments and faculties, it was obvious that staff in different parts of the college already kept many records and these could be co-ordinated centrally without imposing too many additional systems.

Good practice or useful information in one area of a college rarely seemed to have been shared with others, *eg* systems for setting up work experience, employer contacts, ideas for projects or advisory groups, and information about the local labour market. Again, responsibility for central co-ordination seemed to be the key to persuading staff to share information, although in the bigger GFCs staff will need to be convinced that they will benefit from sharing their employer contacts.

Recommended areas for action:

Although there was no evidence or enthusiasm for a centrally managed system of all college–employer activities, having some central leadership and co-ordination could be valuable — for example a senior manager with responsibility for information systems and staff development relating to college–employer interaction across a college. The sharing of good practice internally, and the wider spread of the knowledge and experience of employer governors would be likely to improve responsiveness.

4.3 Managing changes in employer led education and training

4.3.1 Managing increased flexibility

The findings in the study mirrored national trends in employer led training and showed that, as expected, colleges had experienced a decline in the traditional standardised apprenticeship based day release courses. They were increasingly providing

shorter, more customised training courses for employers, but these could be difficult to manage effectively as staff and resources were often used by day release courses or full time students. Colleges were coping in different ways: *eg* the use of employers' premises or other venues, reductions in timetables for some staff, using part-time consultants, or training during weekends and evenings. These measures were helpful to some extent, but still rather *ad hoc;* the findings from the study, and the national trends indicate this type of work is now becoming the norm, and colleges need to plan for its management otherwise development and expansion will be constrained.

There were no examples in our case studies of colleges which had really managed to find the ideal solution to these difficulties. Discrete business units were at different stages of development but there were some successful examples. They were a useful way of providing flexibility and better resources and quality, but could be divisive where they cream off high quality staff and resources from other college work. In some cases this could be for comparatively small numbers of trainees and a small percentage of the college's overall income. Some very successful interaction also went on in colleges without specialist business units. Staff were given autonomy, support and encouragement, including some time and resources, from principals and senior staff, to prepare new courses for employers and deliver them. This feeling that the work is important for the college and visibly valued is an important one to engender.

Colleges had responded to sectoral changes in employer led training (*eg* reductions in the engineering and construction sectors, but an increase in commerce, finance and health care) by making substantial changes to staffing and resources, although in some subjects full-time and other student numbers had increased to make up the shortfall. There was a real dilemma in all colleges about how far to diversify and/or expand different areas of employer led work. Most colleges had been able to retain some specialist vocational provision which varied depending on the skills required by employers in the area, and on the colleges' staff and equipment (*eg* power engineering, optic installations, computer-aided design (CAD) and green-keeping). The retention of these niche markets is important because they play to colleges' strengths locally, and can provide national and, in some cases, international markets.

Recommended areas for action:

Colleges need to set clear planning priorities for different types of employer led work based on their identified benefits and the strengths of the college. There should be a policy for the management of flexible, customised delivery of training. College staff need clear messages about the priorities and management, and a clear rationale should be given for time and resources allocated to different types of employer led training.

4.3.2 Quality

Employers who had received customised training felt that the quality of the staff, teaching, resources and equipment were mostly satisfactory and sometimes excellent, but considered that there was room for improvement in understanding their needs and those of industry generally. FE colleges were putting their energies into developing customised work and consultancy, and were proud of their achievements. Evaluation, feedback from employers, and quality standards seemed to be already well developed in colleges for this type of work, but TECs are currently introducing their own quality standards into local service agreements for approved consultants and trainers. Developing the standards in consultation with employers and providers such as colleges would help to ensure their validity and acceptability.

Colleges gave the impression that day release training was a declining area of work, although there was no data available to show what percentage of employer led work is represented. On the whole employers were satisfied with the day release training itself, although from just a few there were criticisms of the course content, quality of training and lack of relevance to the workplace. There was quite a lot of criticism however about communication and contact with the colleges, particularly the lack of information about the course, and feedback about trainees' progress and attendance. The lack of attention to some employers as 'customers' in this area can give a bad impression of the college.

Recommended areas for action:

Quality systems should be equally rigorous for all employer led work within colleges. Quality standards for training providers which are standard across all TECs would make for consistency and acceptability. They could be developed in collaboration with colleges and employers.

4.3.3 Generating new business

Few colleges were successful in actively generating business from new markets; most of them said that they relied quite a lot on repeat business and existing contacts. In all except one case study area, colleges were dealing with more SMEs because of the reduction in large private sector companies. Liaison with SMEs was much more time-consuming and less cost-effective. TECs can play a useful facilitating role here, *eg* one TEC in the study carried out a training needs analysis of SMEs and set up a consortium of colleges to meet the identified needs, thus reducing the college's workload and stimulating new markets.

All colleges had a member of staff with a marketing or industrial liaison function, but not always at a senior level. Their roles were not always clear, and sometimes several people had

different responsibilities in this area, but did not share information. What seemed to be most effective was a senior manager within the organisation, with a clear responsibility for marketing but linking this to the development of employer-led work. They liaised with employers at a strategic level, had good marketing skills, and access to employers' organisations, LMI, and TECs. They raised awareness of the college outside but also generated new employer led work, or managed other staff with these functions. They acted as a contact for companies, and communication from employers was logged and acted upon.

Recommended areas for action:

Training needs analyses of SMEs in particular are needed, and ways of providing cost-effective training for them — eg TECs could have a role in organising consortia of colleges to offer training. There is a need for a senior management *role within the college, to link marketing closely to the development of* all *employer led work, not just full cost recovery, and provide a point of contact for employers.*

4.3.4 Managing for cost-effectiveness

The cost-effectiveness of increasing full-cost recovery work significantly was an issue for all colleges interviewed. The percentage of college income from full-cost recovery, employer led work in the study was generally very low. SFCs offered only a limited number of small-scale specialist areas and most did not plan significant increases in employer led work.

It was apparent that for many colleges employer led training was not the most cost-effective way of earning income. They provided it because it was a good way to maintain links with industry, keep up to date, and demonstrate the college's responsiveness to employers, rather than purely to generate income. Some colleges could and did earn income more easily from other sources *eg* increasing the numbers of full-time and part-time students, overseas students' fees, the letting of premises. As colleges become more commercial organisations they may decide to earn income more easily from sources other than employer led training. The current FEFC emphases on financial stability and growth, and the funding methodology itself, have had a strong influence on colleges' business decisions. Until they are more secure as corporations, planning and development which maximises income will remain a very high priority.

Most employers used other training providers in addition to FE colleges, and competition in the training market had increased. Some used private training providers and suppliers of equipment or software which they purchased. Very few employers interviewed used the colleges for senior management training. Although only a very small number of SMEs criticised the price of college courses, the market is competitive and price

sensitive, especially for lower level training where NVQs predominate. The issue of 'franchised' courses for employers was raised as a possible way to provide cost-effective training for employers to replace the 'subsidised' day release courses which employers traditionally used.

Recommended areas for action:

Apart from standardised day release courses and specialist technical subjects, colleges need to keep development costs down and control prices. This could be done by providing employer led training which needs only minor modifications to be tailored to several employers' different needs, using existing qualifications and staff expertise. There is a need for clarity about how far franchising is an acceptable way of subsidising employers' training. Colleges may need additional incentives to expand the provision of employer led training if this is not cost-effective for them.

4.4 Valuing work related activities with students

Work related activities with non-employed students could now be the largest source of college–employer interaction, although it was not possible to prove this from the study because no data is available. Because of the increase in the number of non-employed students, these voluntary activities involve many college staff and have an impact on large numbers of employers and students. The activities we found were mainly work experience, work shadowing, or projects done jointly by students and employers.

Many benefits were cited by students, *eg* the improvement of their core skills and confidence, and seeing the reality of their potential career. Employers liked helping students in this way, and felt that it was beneficial for the image of the company. Everyone was unanimous that this work should continue, but there are factors which constrain the activities and these are discussed below.

4.4.1 The need for quality and support

The impact of work related activities may be underestimated by college senior managers in particular. From the interviews we found that going to a work placement, even for half a day a week, was a very important experience for students, their parents, and employers. It is an activity by which they judge the whole college and its students — the face of the college in the community. The quality of the activities on the whole was praised by employers and students but there were problems caused by poor communication and administrative systems and, for college staff involved, lack of time.

A related issue is the emphasis employers place on personal contact. Employers interviewed were loyal to their college

contacts, but some felt that they were being taken for granted because they had little personal contact with the colleges. Employers preferred personal visits or at least discussions by telephone, to paperwork; some were willing to take a more active role in students' activities, but again mentioned personal contact rather than paperwork. They expected the initiative to be taken by colleges in telling employers what they wanted from them. With increasing competition from schools and universities for placements with employers, the issue of mechanisms for colleges to maintain personal contact is becoming more important.

Although college senior managers interviewed said that this work was very important, it appeared to be given lower status compared with employer led activities. Senior staff left the implementation of work related activities to vocational departments and only in some SFCs did we find them collecting and collating information, or checking up on how well it was working. In all colleges the process of setting up, monitoring and evaluating work experience was typified by lack of resources and support, non-involvement of senior staff, and exclusion from college quality systems. Most of the staff interviewed felt they managed the activities with little or no time allowance, and inadequate administrative backup. They believed in the benefits of it for the students and felt it kept them in touch with employers, but few felt they had the time to develop it further, and were clearly struggling to manage it effectively.

Recommended areas for action:

There is a need for the importance of work related activities to employers, students and the college to be recognised and valued. The work needs a higher profile and level of support inside more colleges, and its success needs to be 'sold' more outside colleges.

Staff in all colleges had the same fairly simple requests to improve the system: better access to telephones, clerical support for the range of letters and agreements needed, and someone to receive employers' telephone calls whilst they were teaching.

Minimum quality standards for work related activities could be introduced, based on employers' and students' perspectives.

4.4.2 Changing approaches to work related activities

It must be noted that many students found their work experience very satisfactory. The most successful activities were those which integrated the work related activity closely to the students' needs and their role was clearly defined beforehand. Vocational students considered this an integral part of their courses, and it was included in all GNVQ courses we saw. 'A' level students who were interviewed valued the opportunity to

see whether their chosen career option was suitable before making decisions about university courses. There is scope for increasing this work with 'A' level students. The SFCs on the whole took this more seriously than other colleges, and gave more attention to quality and to publicising successes.

College staff and company employees supervising students are likely to need more time and support as work related activities are increasingly integrated into GNVQs and assessed towards a qualification. Project based activities linked specifically to an employer's activities were popular with employers and students but time-consuming to set up, and some TEC funding had supported this work. Increased amounts of time are needed for preparation and assessment of projects and portfolios at college and the workplace.

Work shadowing was seen as an alternative to work experience in some colleges, especially where 'A' level students were looking at a potential career in higher level jobs which they would be unable to actually do during work experience. Employers and students who had experienced it seemed very satisfied. This is an activity which might be easier to 'sell' to employers since it places fewer demands on them than work experience. Trading work experience places for other benefits to employers operated in a few colleges (*eg* colleges provided some free or subsidised training for employers in return for work placements for students) and this could be developed further.

Recommended areas for action:

College and company senior managers need to be aware of the increasing complexity of some activities and allow staff and employees adequate time for preparation and supervision of students in the workplace. There is also a need for support for innovation and quality in work related activities, to supplement, enhance and, in some cases replace, the traditional form of work experience.

4.5 Colleges' responsiveness within the wider community

4.5.1 Employers as part of colleges' wider constituencies

Since incorporation, colleges have had a large degree of freedom to define their own constituency and analyse its needs. For some colleges in the study, their focus was very small and localised, others embraced wider regional, national or international constituencies. The breadth of the constituency depended on external factors such as competition from other providers, the nature of the population and the local economy, and internal factors such as the mission and priorities of the college principal and governors, and the staffing and resources of the college.

Meeting employers' training needs might not be a college's top priority because of the nature of this constituency, although all colleges are likely to continue to have large amounts of interaction with employers. As we found in some areas, activities with other groups could take precedence over employers. For example, in an area dominated by SMEs who did very little recruitment and training, one college chose to focus on full-time students and part-time non-employed adults. In another area, with several colleges in competition, an SFC focused on high quality provision for full time students going into HE.

FEFC's analysis of colleges' strategic plans shows 14 different local bodies or groups which were consulted by colleges for their needs analysis. In addition, the FEFC inspection framework assesses colleges' responsiveness to employers and the wider community, and TECs provide labour market information for broad geographical and vocational areas. There is a danger that colleges might try to be responsive to too many groups and/or have an ill-defined constituency in which they are not fully aware of the groups (including employers) and individuals to which they could or should respond.

Recommended areas for action:

Priorities for responsiveness need to be based on the local picture and the strengths of the college. The acquisition and understanding of economic and demographic data, plus useful labour market information, would maximise college decision-making. College strategic planning could be used more as a vehicle for clearly defining the focus of responsiveness and the setting of priorities.

4.5.2 Colleges and labour markets

Colleges' main concerns since incorporation have been to maintain financial viability and increase participation. The former is to some extent dependent on the latter via FEFC's funding mechanism. These concerns were evident from senior college staff, and this combination of demands has led colleges to see success mainly in terms of recruitment and growth, in which they have been successful.

Colleges are expected to take account of labour market information in drawing up their strategic plans but they were unclear about the extent to which this should influence their intake of students and provision of courses. Currently, there is a strong temptation to offer courses which are popular and which increase their numbers, and less interest in whether this is linked to a specific labour market requirement. There was a sense that college guidance systems might be emphasising choice at entry more than offering guidance into the labour market. The gap we began to find towards the end of the research was the lack of explicit and systematic exit guidance.

Colleges were using LMI to draw up their strategic plans, and to some extent to plan employer-led work, but on the whole they did not find the LMI produced by TECs useful. Some TECs themselves admitted that it lacked detail and was difficult for colleges to use in any practical way. Many college staff admitted that they did not know how to use the LMI, others that they found their local authority economic development units more helpful.

Recommended areas for action:

In a demand led situation, there would appear to be scope for more co-ordinated exit guidance from FE into the labour market; the role of the Careers Service may need to be investigated in relation to this. The collection and analysis of data on student destinations in a more systematic way would encourage colleges to understand patterns of recruitment better.

There needs to be clarity for colleges on the extent to which they should base their course provision and intake of students on LMI. It needs to be in a form which is useful to them, and college staff need better guidance and training in how to understand and use it.

4.6. TECs and college responsiveness

4.6.1 The relationship between TECs and colleges

TECs have an increasing responsibility for the development of the skills of the local and national workforce, but the extent to which they saw a role for colleges in that development varied significantly. Most TECs were not closely involved in, or aware of, the scale of the overall interaction between colleges and employers, and did not see all colleges in their locality as key players in relation to current TEC priorities. Many college staff and employers felt that TECs did not have a useful role in relation to their current activities. There is a need for better contact and communication between TECs and colleges, and clarity about their respective roles in the community.

4.6.2 Local and national initiatives

The phrase 'initiative overload' cropped up many times in interviews, particularly with employers. The word initiatives is used here to cover both small-scale local 'projects' and national programmes such as YT or NVQs, because participants made little differentiation between them. Actual benefits of some initiatives could be identified, *eg* IiP had encouraged quite a number of employers in the study to train their staff, teacher placements in industry had been useful, and SFCs used local networks of initiatives such as Young Enterprise and Understanding Industry, to maintain and develop links with employers. However, the majority of colleges, and employers in

particular, were confused and put off by the proliferation of initiatives and their acronyms.

TECs had all given some useful financial support at some time to college–employer activities. This had mostly promoted small-scale projects and innovatory developments between learners, colleges and employers, usually in a specific vocational sector. Most had involved very small numbers, thus having little impact on the majority of employers and college staff. The support had been very variable and lacked consistency from one area to another. This had increased the sense of competition and suspicion in some localities.

The issue for employers and colleges was about whether or not it was worth getting involved in initiatives. Colleges felt obliged to get involved in some in order to receive funding, or be seen to be involved, but felt that they had to spend a lot of effort *eg* attending meetings, writing proposals, for little reward. Employers were less interested. The Competitiveness Fund was an example of colleges and employers having been involved in the very time-consuming process of bidding whilst this study was under way. College staff we spoke to who had not been successful felt that they and the employers they had involved were very jaundiced about the time spent on this kind of speculative procedure.

Recommended areas for action:

There is a case for TECs to have a reasonably close relationship with all colleges in the area, beyond the formal meetings required with the principal, and find out more about colleges' activities. There is also a responsibility for colleges to understand the function and role of TECs better. Colleges can also quantify their very extensive experience and expertise in meeting employers' needs, and 'sell' this more to TECs.

Since many initiatives are managed through the TECs, there must be an onus on them to try to bring some coherence to these activities and to find ways in which more colleges and employers can benefit from them. If the most successful initiatives were identified, their success could be extended. An issue for consideration is the amount of competitive tendering and bidding for contracts which employers and colleges are required to do.

4.7 Indirect responsiveness

There was sometimes an assumption on everyone's part during the project, when talking about responsiveness, that it related directly to the colleges providing training or consultancy specifically at the request of employers. For most colleges this is a very important element of what they do but the research also showed that being responsive goes much wider, and includes a considerable amount of what we could be called *indirect responsiveness*. This includes activities which focus on

responsiveness to individual learners or on employers' needs other than for training and recruitment.

4.7.1 Responsiveness to individuals

Individual learners, not employers, were the main priority for many college staff we interviewed. This did not mean that they did not interact with employers; on the contrary, they undertook work-related activities with employers frequently, often over and above course requirements. The motivation was to help learners to get a better educational experience and qualifications, as currency in the labour market, and they used employers as a resource. It has also to be recognised that responsiveness can be shown in other ways, *eg* by colleges recruiting staff from industrial backgrounds, offering nationally recognised vocational qualifications (some of which have been developed by employer led bodies), and using employers' guidance about courses and qualifications. So, although many college staff did not see employers as their main 'customers', they were responsive to the needs of individuals for relevant skills and qualifications as potential employees.

4.7.2 Responsiveness to employers' other needs

Many employers were not using colleges to train employees or recruit young people, but they did like working with students on work related activities; they found them interesting and enthusiastic, and wanted to help them. They also knew that there were some tangible benefits in the form of a better image for the company, extra labour provided by the students, and the chance to try people out before recruitment. However, they mainly wanted to help because of the *'feel good factor'* as one employer called it, which came from helping young people and the wider community. By involving employers in activities with students, colleges are not just meeting students' needs; they are responding to employers' needs which are more community orientated, less obvious than training and recruitment, but equally important.

Recommended areas for action:

There needs to be a greater awareness and understanding of the reasons employers undertake different activities with colleges, and the benefits they reap. The value of the more indirect aspects of college responsiveness need to be taken into account in policy making, strategic planning and funding, at national as well as college level.

4.8 In Conclusion

The key to understanding the responsiveness of colleges is gain a thorough understanding of the interaction between colleges and employers in all its forms, and its effectiveness. The study

has provided this, and shown that a great deal of interaction is taking place, that it is currently subject to many changes, and that employers feel that the responsiveness of FE colleges to their needs is improving.

Whilst we found many examples of ways in which employers and colleges benefited from their interaction, and how it has influenced college provision, it was difficult to assess its scale because of a lack of data on current practice. Most of the activities were perceived to be successful by the employers, learners and college staff involved, but evidence of effectiveness was rarely collected systematically. Although the individual activities were usually well structured and organised, a notable finding of the study was the lack of overall coherence in the management and development of college–employer interaction in most colleges. To maximise responsiveness there is a need for coherent planning and development across all interaction.

We can conclude that colleges demonstrate responsiveness in a variety of ways; by the scale and breadth of interaction, by the quality and effectiveness of that interaction, and by their response to changes in employers' needs and in the wider community. The responsiveness can be very direct — a response to employers' identified training needs, or it can be more indirect, *ie* enhancing the quality of education and training for the future workforce by using employers for work related activities and advice. All forms of responsiveness need to be recognised and valued.

There is potential for enhancing colleges' responsiveness by increasing, improving or changing interaction with employers, and evidence from the study showed that colleges are already doing all this to some extent. At the same time however, they are also having to respond to the need for growth and cost-effectiveness, and trying to meet the needs of their community and the individuals in it. Any further action, by employers, national bodies or colleges themselves, to change, increase or improve responsiveness needs to take account of this, and the fact that since incorporation, colleges' commercial and financial decisions now strongly influence their priorities for interaction and responsiveness.

Annex 1: Classification of College–Employer Interaction with Examples

Learner Centred Interaction

A. Employer led education and training

Education and training

- vocational courses/training/assessment
- day-release training for employees
- on-site training of employees
- short courses
- NVQ assessment in the workplace
- TDLB Trainer and Assessor Awards
- basic skills provision (literacy, numeracy)
- accreditation of prior achievement/learning
- open/distance learning
- training needs analysis

Resources

- use of premises and equipment for meetings, events, sports etc.
- catering facilities

B. Voluntary work-related activity with students

Work placement and experience

- work placements/shadowing/experience for students
- accommodation/resources for mock interviews

Curriculum development

- taking part in work simulations/assignments/projects
- help with devising/assessing college assignments
- assistance/training in enterprise programmes

Resources

- assignments in the workplace
- recording of achievement in the workplace
- use of employers' premises for meetings, events
- workplace visits
- donation/presentation of prizes
- gifts of money/equipment
- sponsorship of students/resources/activities

Formal/ Commercial Focus

Voluntary/ Informal Focus

D. Local/ regional planning with other organisations

Liaison

- liaison with other training providers & employers
- liaison with advisory services (Careers Service, Job Centres)
- joint workshops/training
- membership of partnership arrangements/computer matching service
- joining/supporting business clubs

Strategic planning

- gathering and providing information (NTETs, labour markets, demographic data)
- assessing local/national training needs
- analysis of data to plan provision
- joint planning to meet local needs

Funding

- ensuring provision of appropriate training
- sponsoring pilot projects

C. Planning/advisory activities to aid individual colleges/employers

Employers' advice to colleges

- governing body membership
- sector advisory group membership
- careers advice
- mentoring programmes
- advice on curriculum/resources/strategic planning
- responses to customer satisfaction surveys
- teacher placements in industry

Colleges' advice and information to employers

- advice on qualifications/funding
- help with recruitment and selection
- information about education and training developments
- work related research projects

Planning Based Interaction

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Examples of joint activities involving TECs and other intermediaries

Information

newsletter/media coverage
training/education/employment developments
setting up/supporting/maintaining databases of education and business offers and needs

Quality management/ control

developing and implementing quality measures
disseminating good practice
ensuring equal opportunities provision

Facilitating/ organising joint activities

conferences/seminars/workshops for students/staff
joint purchasing of equipment/services
prospectuses/charters
joint research projects
setting up and maintaining databases
staff training/seminars/workshops

Liaison/brokerage

brokerage between training providers and employers
liaison with training/education advisory services (Careers Service, Job Centres)
promotion of joint workshops/training
organisation of partnership arrangements/computer matching service
setting up/supporting business clubs

Strategic planning

gathering and providing information (NTETS, labour markets, demographic data)
assessing local/national training needs
analysis of data to plan provision
facilitation of joint planning to meet local needs

Funding

ensuring provision of appropriate training
sponsoring pilot projects
organising joint bids for funding

Annex 2: Research Methodology

A2.1 Introduction

The research methodology followed the sponsors' proposal of dealing in depth with a number of coherent groups or clusters of colleges, employers and TECs which interact with each other. IES carried out face-to-face interviews with a range of key individuals involved in the different types of activities and, to elicit students' views, semi-structured group discussions. Additional views on the classification and interim findings were obtained through four national workshops in June, arranged by FEFC; an expert colloquium was also hosted by them.

A2.2 Selection and agreement of participant organisations

The study needed to include a large enough number of areas to cover all the types of interaction in the classification and a representative range of colleges, TECs and employers. At the same time it had to be sufficiently manageable to meet time and financial constraints.

We selected clusters of organisations which formed coherent groups for the case studies. Each cluster consisted of:

- one TEC
- 3 to 4 colleges in each TEC area
- a small number of employers who interact with each college
- other local/regional intermediaries such as EBPs if relevant.

After discussion with the sponsors it was agreed to carry out case studies with six clusters. The selection of the six cluster areas was based on characteristics which represented not only the range of interaction applicable to colleges and employers across the country but on other factors such as:

- geographical location: *eg* urban, rural, inner city, north, south
- economic factors: *eg* type and size of industry, level of unemployment
- size and type of college: *eg* sixth form colleges, general FE, specialist (*eg* agricultural)

- the degree of active involvement of TECs and other intermediaries.

It was necessary to select groups of colleges which operated in the same TEC area so that comparisons and links could be made with the TEC activities.

Initially, a long list of 14 areas and 45 colleges was drawn up based on the above criteria. The final selection of areas, and colleges within those areas was made in conjunction with FEFC regional staff who provided information on the amount of employer led enrolment in each college. When a short list was produced, the FEFC guided us away from colleges who were felt to be undergoing any pressures such as inspection, which might affect their ability to give time to the project, and this refined the final selection.

Three colleges and one TEC declined to take part. In the case of colleges, others in the same TEC area were contacted and took part. In the case of the TEC, it was felt worthwhile to continue with the area as the colleges were keen to be involved and they would still be able to describe the role of the TEC as they saw it in their interaction with employers.

A.2.3 Selection and interviewing of key individuals

TECs. The (Senior) Education Manager, and EBP staff were interviewed in five areas.

Colleges. IES carried out interviews in 19 colleges. In each we interviewed an average of five members of staff and 1 or 2 groups of students (totalling over 100 staff plus 100 students). Students were selected by colleges and were either employees attending college on a part-time basis, or full-time students with experience of interaction with employers. In all colleges, a senior member of college staff with responsibility for some cross-college links with employers was also interviewed. Interviewees covered a wide range of occupational areas.

The overall coverage of participants in the study represented the different types of interaction, although it was not possible to do this in every college.

Employers. Each college provided a list of employers with whom they interact. TECs also provided lists and from the lists we selected approximately five employers per college to interview. Contacts were mainly the person at the company who liaises with the college on education and training. It was particularly important to include small to medium-sized employers who represented the types of activity commonly carried out with the colleges. Seventy five employers were interviewed, either face to face or by telephone (20 per cent).

Interviews

Discussion guides were developed for use with the different participants and were intended to be just that, guides to discussion, rather than tightly structured questionnaires. They were agreed with the FEFC Research and Statistics Department, and with the Employment Department's Survey Control Unit.

IES carried out face-to-face interviews with college staff, employers and TEC/EBP staff, but to elicit students' views it was considered that a group setting was more likely to encourage students to be open and discursive; it also allowed for more students' views to be heard within the time constraints.

The research review identified four main types of interaction between colleges and employers and suggested that there might be differences between them in terms of the factors which the sponsors wished to investigate. IES therefore decided to try to investigate each of the activities in some depth with appropriate interviewees.

Separate discussion guides were provided for college staff who were involved in each of the four types of interaction (A to D) in the classification. An additional guide was used with cross-college managers of marketing, employer liaison *etc.*, one for employers, and for students. The discussion guides included questions on the following areas:

- the size and scope of each type of interaction, and data collection
- the size and type of employers involved, the number and percentage of college staff/students involved
- employers' education policies and budgets
- any changes and trends in activities in the last 2 to 3 years
- the benefits of interaction to staff, students employers and evidence/measures/indicators of success
- the critical factors promoting or inhibiting success
- what colleges and employers are doing to maximise success
- the role of college governors
- the role of cross-college managers
- links with TECs and other agencies and their role in college–employer interaction
- how well colleges meet the needs of employers
- ways of improving responsiveness.

A wide range of learners, employers and college staff was covered by the study.

A.2.4 National workshops and expert colloquium

FEFC convened four workshops in Yorkshire, Durham, Somerset and London and invited representatives of colleges, employers, TECs and other bodies to attend. Those who had participated in the project were also invited. Participants were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the classification, to comment on the interim findings, and to suggest points for further action. They did this in group workshops facilitated by representatives of the sponsors and IES, and notes were taken. IES incorporated these into the final report. The colloquium in June provided perspectives on college–employer interaction from representatives of national bodies. Their views were noted and key points were taken into account in this report.

A.2.5 Steering group

The sponsors were advised by a steering group which included representatives from:

- the Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- British Nuclear Fuels
- two colleges
- one TEC.

Annex 3: Successful Outcomes and Criteria for Measuring Success

TYPE A Activities. Employer-led training

For colleges	For employers
• customer satisfaction measured via course evaluation/review from employers/ employees (usually full-cost only) • repeat business (same courses and/or same people) • qualifications achieved by participants • amount of income • numbers/range of employers involved • numbers/enrolments of participants • informal feedback from participants/ contacts	• qualifications gained by employees • attendance/completion of courses • improved performance of employees • improved motivation of employees • value for money compared to other providers • internal feedback from course participants • retention of employees

TYPE B Activities. Employers' voluntary activities with students (work experience)

For colleges	For employers
• attendance/drop out of students on work experience • numbers of students who need work experience getting it • log books/diaries/reports/review sheets from students and employers • verbal feedback/reports from students/ employers • appropriate range of places with employers • portfolios of evidence/completed projects	• informal feedback from employees supervising students • observation • attendance/punctuality of students • successful achievement of work tasks • reports and evaluations for college staff • review meetings/presentations from students.

TYPE C Activities. Employers involved in advisory activities to the college

For colleges	For employers
• number and type of employers on governing body • range of college activities which involve employers • existence of advisory groups/employers' forum • frequency/regularity of meetings of advisory groups • attendance of employers at advisory activities • changes to courses/curriculum in response to advice • number and range of college staff involved in activities with employers • number of visits to individual employers (all levels of staff)	• employers advice on curriculum or courses implemented • specific tasks/initiatives/targets achieved • amount and level of contact with college staff • college being more responsive to employers' needs

TYPE D Activities. Employers involved in local/regional planning for education and training

For colleges	For employers
• type and level of college representation on local/regional committees • number of staff who attend employer bodies' functions, eg Chamber of Commerce • involvement with large/prestigious employers • funding for the college from TEC or other initiatives • level of influence college has on regional activities	• relevance of meetings/events to employers' interests • attendance of college senior staff at meetings/events • tasks/projects put into operation • greater responsiveness of education to employment issues

Annex 4: Factors Promoting and Inhibiting Success

TYPE A Activities. Employer-led training

Critical factors inhibiting success	
Colleges' views	**Employers' views**
• inability to be as flexible/responsive with timing or curriculum; conflict with full-time courses • lack of time to initiate/develop this area • lack of college staff with appropriate background/experience • employers out of touch with recent developments in vocational education • employers lack of clarity/understanding about their own training needs • meeting wide variety of SME's needs • putting together financially viable groups of students • development costs by college which might not be recouped	• poor feedback on day release training from college on attendance, performance, course details, problems • poor communications/lack of accessibility of college staff • inability of college to meet requests for training at short notice • poor quality of teaching staff, *eg* out of date, problems with level or age of students • rigidity of day release courses re timing and content • theory taught at college not relevant to practice at work

Critical factors promoting success	
Colleges' views	**Employers' views**
• offering value for money/cost effectiveness • providing training relevant to work • providing good quality experience (both professional and enjoyable) • use of appropriate, experienced college staff • ability to provide what employers want, when and where they want it • professional/commercial image/behaviour on the part of the college	• good lines of communication with college staff • personal contact/relationships/visits from college staff • good quality teaching staff • adequate and up-to-date resources/equipment • clear identification of employers' needs • college curriculum/theory relevant to workplace • flexibility of colleges to provide what employers need • good service at competitive prices

TYPE B Activities. Employers' voluntary activities with students (work experience)

Critical factors inhibiting success	
College staff/students' views	**Employers' views**
• lack of student motivation/interest • lack of telephones/admin support at college to make arrangements • never enough time to prepare work experience properly on top of other jobs • more competition for work placements and overloaded employers • student travel problems — cost, distance and convenience • lack of clear role for student and briefing notes often not read by employers • placement not appropriate for student's career/interests • problems are not communicated to the college early enough • employees too rushed to explain things and to help with projects/assignments	• college staff not replying to calls, sending information, letting them know dates or times • college not briefing employers sufficiently about students/courses • timing of placements — same block at the same time each year, or half day placements • colleges not explaining to students the pressures of the workplace and behaviour expected • some college staff do not know enough about the workplace • employers' own personnel not trained/prepared to deal with having a student

Critical factors promoting success	
College staff/students' views	**Employers' views**
• positive attitude from students • college setting up activities properly and briefing employers and students beforehand • the relevance of the placement to the course or career • college being clear with employers and students exactly what sort of role they will be playing • college monitoring activities and briefing everyone involved to report problems early • students being treated as an adult by workplace staff • students being told what they can/cannot do and being shown how to do things • students having responsibility for specific tasks, person or people	• good personal communication/liaison with the college before, during and after activities • positive attitude of the student, eg good communication skills, reliability, punctuality, motivation • programme of work with targets for achievement, preferably planned by the company • company time to organise a programme and supervise students properly • keeping students interested • an enthusiastic person at the college and personal visits from staff • college staff knowing what goes on in each particular workplace

TYPE C Activities. Employers involved in advisory activities to the college

Critical factors inhibiting success	
Colleges' views	**Employers' views**
• lack of time to organise meetings/make visits to employers • competition for employers' time • employers' lack of understanding of college staff roles and responsibilities • employers' lack of understanding of the demands of qualifications/awarding bodies • some companies very inward looking because of downsizing and restructuring	• lack of college organisation and planning for meetings • constant changes in education and training • colleges' lack of understanding of pressures of business • college staff who are out of touch with industrial practices and lack experience of industry • too much paperwork from colleges

Critical factors promoting success	
Colleges' views	**Employers' views**
• keeping regular contact with employers — all levels of staff • involvement of employers in setting agendas, specific tasks or targets to work towards • using appropriate college staff • using a business-like professional approach to employers • keep an open door policy to employers • keeping employers' interest and keeping them in touch	• responsive, professional and enthusiastic college staff (all levels) • close personal contact with college staff (telephone and visits) • clear demands/expectations of employers • working jointly on commonly agreed targets/activities/tasks • involvement of employers in new courses and developments • employers keeping colleges informed of changes in their sector • existence of company policies and encouragement for educational links

TYPE D Activities. Employers involved in local/regional planning for education and training

Critical factors inhibiting success	
Colleges' views	**Employers' views**
• time — additional to other duties for all • competition for the best employers to be on committees • lack of response from high proportion of small employers • competition with other colleges • lack of TEC support/understanding • time needed to prepare bids for funding • most activities involve senior staff — little feedback to others	• constant changes in education and training • some companies have to be inward looking because of downsizing and restructuring • some college staff out of touch with industrial practices and lack experience of industry • time needed to attend meeting • lack of clear objectives for activities • too many initiatives

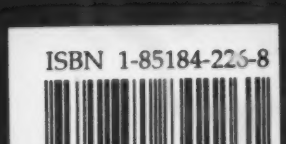
Critical factors promoting success	
Colleges' views	**Employers' views**
• keeping in touch with the key organisations in the region • college staff in key positions or involved in activities • supportive TEC attitude to colleges • keeping in touch with the most active /prestigious employers • senior managers keeping close contact with employers through visits or invitations to college • focused/structured meetings	• working towards joint objectives, *eg* NTETS, regional regeneration or training initiatives • colleges now required to demonstrate responsiveness • professional/business-like approach of college staff • personal contact with college senior staff • relevance of activities to employers' interests • focused/structured meetings • employers being kept informed of new developments in education and training • employers keeping colleges and others informed of changes in their sector • company policies and encouragement

Developing Responsiveness: College – Employer Interaction

IES investigated the nature of interaction between colleges and employers, and the factors promoting or inhibiting success. The study was commissioned jointly by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The work was carried out during 1995 and involved interviews with 75 employers, five TECs, and staff and students from 19 colleges. This report presents the findings, and provides a functional model for the management and development of college interaction with employers.

The Institute for Employment Studies
Mantell Building
University of Sussex
Brighton
BN1 9RF

ISBN 1-85184-226-8



83